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HORIZON

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H A R R A P

COMMENT

The position of the artist to-day should occasion general concern were it not that the whole human race seems threatened by an interior urge to destruction. He occupies, amid the surrounding dilapidation, a corner even more dilapidated, sitting with his begging bowl in the shadow of the volcano. What can be done to help him? In the event of the defeat of England and France, nothing. We are accustomed to the idea that there is no art worth the name in Germany and Italy (although Italy possesses a high standard of taste—witness her pavilions in recent exhibitions, and a group of interesting young painters) but we are less familiar with the fact that literature and painting are becoming more and more confined to the Western Democracies, the countries where wealth and appreciation survive, and where the environment is friendly. A defeat of those countries would mean the extinction of the 'liberal' arts in Western Europe, as much as of the liberal opinion. A new art might develop under the Swastickles, but there is nothing to prove that the Totalitarian state can germinate even a non-critical, or self-contained art like music.

But in the democracies themselves the artist finds himself tolerated rather than appreciated. Unless he is a purveyor of amusement or a mouthpiece of official cliché he is there on sufferance, and before suggestions for the betterment of his condition can be made, we must consider his ideal status in life. Just as education cannot improve until the world for which children are educated improves, so the artist cannot receive his due until the society in which he lives fundamentally revises its conception of the objects of existence. Many people would accept the idea of a benevolent world socialism as their political aim, a world in which all the resources were available to its inhabitants, in which heat and fuel and food were as free as air and water, in which Marx's familiar definition of an ultimate civilisation, "to each according to

his needs, from each according to his ability" was made good. But this world does nothing for the spiritual life of humanity except to provide for all its inhabitants the material comfort and security which has hitherto provided the point of departure for the spiritual life of the few. The final happiness of humanity must depend on its capacity to evolve, on the use it makes of the capacity—found only in human beings—of getting outside itself, of extending human consciousness to include the perception of human phenomena, till it is not only aware of but able to transcend the laws by which it is governed. Otherwise to achieve a material utopia, however difficult and desirable, is still to doom the race to the disintegration of satiety, and the decay inherent in its own limitations.

There are certain types of human beings who are especially equipped for the extension of human consciousness and the domination of the in-human world. They are the scientist, the mystic, the philosopher, the creative artist and the saint. Of these only the scientist receives the partial appreciation of the world, because by subsidising his researches, the world may be the richer by such by-products as the aeroplane or the telephone. Einstein and Freud, the physicist and the psycho-analyst whose inventions were of doubtful value, were exiled by their immediate public. These five types, the pure scientist who uses method in his investigation of natural laws, the philosopher who uses mind, the saint and the mystic who make use of extra-sensitive emotional machinery, and the artist with his dark lantern form the aristocracy of a more perfect world, in which the second order is composed of those who, without seeking to expand human possibilities, work at improving their condition. These would include the reformers and administrators, the practical scientists and inventors, the educators, the alleviators, the doctor and nurses, the practical artists, actors, singers, journalists and entertainers, and the men of law. Then would come the middle-men, the keepers of order and the pillars of trade, and then the great mass

whose progress towards intelligence and happiness was the concern of the others, and lastly the 'blind mouths,' the invincibly ignorant, the obstructive and destructive, the power-grabbers, the back-street Napoleons, the incurable egoists and prima donnas, the criminals, the fifth column rich.

While the greatest explorations of the world beyond our boundaries have been made by scientists, never have writers been so preoccupied with the investigation of spiritual possibilities, and this alone justifies the artist's claim to the respect of mankind. At the moment Wells, Maugham, Joyce, Virginia Woolf, Huxley, Heard, Priestley, Eliot may all be said to be working on it, and, among young writers, a deepening sense of spirituality characterizes the recent poetry of Auden and Spender. There is no escapism from a political present in this, and the best analysis of it is to be found in the opening chapters of Heard's *Pain, Sex and Time*, in which he describes human beings as the prisoners in a submarine who can only escape the fate of the unadaptable species by concentrating all their evolutionary energy on a dangerous and difficult escape by a spiritual Davis apparatus. The value of Picasso's *Guernica*, the work of Proust, of the landscapes of Cézanne, is to penetrate the darkness which surrounds the human campfire, and reveal something of the landscape beyond it. The artist lacks the training and the profound comprehension of a Freud or an Einstein, nor does he make a good philosopher according to academic standards, but his intuitive intensity, his patient obsession, and the quality of his imagination entitle him to rank with the great disappointed Prometheus's of our age, who are changing the world as inexorably as their rulers destroy it.

That is the ideal picture. And even there it will be noticed that most of the artist-sages I have mentioned have accumulated their fame and fortune as artist-entertainers. To-day the scientist is subsidised, the saint is expected to live by his sanctity, the mystic on his mysticism, the artist

by his popularity with his sitters, or with the twopenny libraries. Only the entertainer receives his due, which nobody grudges him, but which hardly compensates for the squalor and penury in which the serious poet or painter is expected to rot. To-day the most precariously situated in any society are that abandoned trio, the writer, the painter and the liberal intellectual. The intellectual is the most unfortunate, for he has no creative power to absorb him, he is the Cassandra of our age, condemned to foresee the future and to warn, but never listened to, nor ever able to profit from his foresight. Without power and without money he has spent the last ten years prophesying a disaster in which he will be the first to perish, unless he has been able to put the Atlantic or the Ministry of Information between him and his pursuers. For the world has disproved the liberal axiom, that persecution defeats its object, it has been shown that an efficient secret police, a concentration camp, or an invasion with tanks and machine guns can silence any opposition, can stop the intellect from questioning or the poet from affirming, and reduce his historical potency to that of the Redskin or the Carib. In any case, artists are easy to suppress, adaptability and subservience to the powers that be, a happy tropism, characterise them as much as inflexible courage and integrity. They recant more merrily than they burn.

What can be done to improve their position? They must, like every defenceless minority, unite, and learn to help each other, to present their case to the public. They must respect their creative mission more than they do at present, and they must force their rulers to respect it, they must realise that their position is desperate, and will become intolerable, that, outside the Western democracies, they are surrounded by enemies, while their friends are dwindling within them. Like the Pet-World, they are the first to feel the rationing, and the change in the standard of living, they will be hard hit if the rentier class, on which many of them are remittance men, goes under, nor is there any political

party likely to come to power to whom the artist and the intellectual are not anathema.

But it is not easy for artists to help themselves. They are not a class for whom co-operation is pleasant. Besides being envious and bitter, as are the economically undernourished, painters often work better through an inability to appreciate the work and aims of their contemporaries. When success permits them, both writers and painters prefer to barricade themselves deep in bourgeois country, like those birds which we admire for their colour and song but which have divided our woods into well-defined gangster pitches of wormy territory. The artist and intellectual are both parasitic on and life-giving to the non-artist and the non-intellectual, they are not to be criticised for being slow to combine with each other, the profits which Simon Elwes accumulates in America would neither be given to nor required by the painters of Fitzroy Street.

Therefore it is the public who must be educated, and the rulers who must be mollified, and here the artists can combine, for the smug hostility of the English is indiscriminately extended to all forms of art. In the February *World Review* Sir Thomas Beecham brilliantly attacks the musical apathy of the nation, the attack must be sustained by artists and writers. The public must be asked to distinguish between the serious writer and the potboiling entertainer, between the poet and the prima donna journalist; the ruling class must be seduced into recognising the importance of the great dollar-producing invisible export of our literature, not only the Mr. Chips, Gracie Fields, Peter Wimsey, brands, which go wherever a bottle of Worcester sauce can penetrate, but the difficult, conscientious and experimental work for which England and France are uniquely adapted, the delayed-action art and literature which survives indifference and slowly dominates—as Rimbaud or Hopkins have dominated—the creative minds of a generation. The idea of quality is an Anglo-French obsession, where the quality

is not easily apprehended, the judges should be lenient. The public in America is vastly more interested in æsthetic experiment than the public here, the intelligent minority is many times larger, and the obsessions of a Henry Moore, or Graham Sutherland, which here are hardly understood, are export articles of undoubted value. Here it may be well to blacklist a few enemies. Artists and writers have their well-wishers, such as the *New Statesman*, the *Listener*, *Shell*, the Director of the National Gallery, the B.B.C. and London Transport. They have also their opponents. Here are a few.

Lord Beaverbrook. This nobleman injects into the jaunty philistinism of his papers a breath of the great art-hating art-fearing open spaces of our far-flung empire. 'You do not often see a writer mentioned on this page' complacently remarks an article in the proprietor's breezy biblical style. What information about art and literature there is in his papers is intelligently but stealthily purveyed by the younger gossip writers. Howard Spring's throne is vacant. A comparison between Agate's *Express* and *Sunday Times* style reveals the degradation of the milieu, and the more intelligent members of the staff take spare-time refuge in esoteric and penitential forms of intellectual recreation. The popular press as a whole, not content to ignore art and literature, fosters such absurd distinctions as that between high-brow and low-brow, which has done more harm to both serious and popular art than any other false classification. It is ridiculous that although journalists like Hickey, or W.M. and Cassandra of the *Mirror*, and Candidus of the *Sketch* are allowed to assume their public is politically intelligent, from the point of view of culture that public is considered a nitwit.

But there are other circles as much to blame. The private and public schools who under the cloak of a genial obscurantism do so much to warp the talent that passes through them, and to harden the untalented in their own

conceit. Then there is the government who, as Sir Hugh Walpole has recently pointed out, do nothing for literature, except to grant occasionally a miserable pittance to some half-starved veteran. Then there are the increasingly illiterate rich, the descendants often of those patrons who willingly gave a hundred pounds away, not for a picture or for a dedication, but to enable an artist to carry on. This practice is almost extinct, and a poet who was given a sum of money for being a poet rather than for writing copy for underclothes would be regarded as an undesirable. A useful remedy for this would be to let it be known that when the inevitable capital levy is imposed any benefactions already made to the arts, to the furtherance of research, or to the betterment of conditions in any form would be taken into account. But this implies a bureaucracy friendly to the arts, and this we have not got either. Freud mentions tidiness, parsimoniousness, and obstinacy as the three characteristics of the Anal Type, and it is engaging that they also symbolise what is called the Official Mind.

Then there are the traitors among the artists themselves, the Publisher, with his Cold Feet, those who are ashamed of their vocation, who accept the enemy's estimate of it and become horse painters or country gentlemen, those who clown for the Philistines, the Wodehouses, Noel Cowards, etc., who throw away their genuine talent through fear of being unpopular, or those defeatists like Henry Miller, who enjoy with Oriental relish the ignominy to which they are subjected and pretend that to starve and to be bullied by bank managers and passport authorities is part of the state to which artists are called, and which they must accept without question. It is true that the artist is drifting towards being a disreputable member of the lower middle classes waiting in a borrowed mackintosh for the Sunday pubs to open, but the privations which improve his talent must be imposed not by society, but by himself—and any investigation of the artist's circumstances reveal that by far the most favourable conditions for him are neither at the

top nor the bottom, but snug in the heart of the bourgeoisie, with a safe middle income, such as nineteenth century capitalism, (the golden age of the remittance man) provided, and such as some other system has to be dragged into paying now.

An opponent particularly dangerous in these times is the near-artist, or Pinhead. Pinheads are a race apart, they are generally tall and bony, anal to the nth degree, but sometimes small and foxy. They are obsessed by a profound hatred of art and are prepared to devote their lives to gratifying it. To do this they occupy a fortified position, either at a university, or in an advanced political party, or as a publisher, and then proceed to castigate the artist, if from the university, on grounds of faulty taste or scholarship, if from a party, on grounds of political unorthodoxy, or loose thinking. Every artist is an exhibitionist. The tragedy of a Pinhead is that he is a repressed exhibitionist, a guilty character whom a too strict censor is punishing for his wicked desire to undress and dance. The Pinhead is consequently attracted to the artist, whose generous immodest antics excite his own, but consumed with envy and disgust for them. The ultimate enemy of art is power. One cannot desire both beauty and power, so the Pinhead, lacking as he does all æsthetic sense, usually obtains power and then becomes one of those puritan commissars of the arts who see nothing in Picasso, who do not 'understand' modern poetry, who examine art through the wrong end of the scientific telescope and see very little, or find no basis for it in Logical Positivism. They wear their Marxism like a hair-shirt, and their triumph is when they have persuaded a painter to abandon colour for abstraction, or a poet to write a political pamphlet, or suppress a novel 'for personal reasons'. Fortunate is the artist to-day who is able to follow his invention without one of these poor bald old homo-puritan Pinheads blowing down his neck.

For the time being, the outlook is black. The painter,

the writer, the liberal intellectual are in for a bad time, if they can co-operate, if they can assert themselves, if they can survive to the incredible period when nations are not afraid of each other, they will come into their own, for they have powerful allies. The working class for instance has not the deeprooted animosity towards artistic creation of the others. Lawrence was not persecuted by them for his secession, but by his betters. The success of the *Penguin* library, or of *Picture Post* or *The March of Time* show what a great potential benefactor an increasingly educated working-class can be. Those who visited Azaña's Spain, our Lost Ally, will recall how pathetically friendly to culture were its masses, and there are many parts of the world where it is still a compliment to call someone an educated man. Even the Court is emerging from two centuries of Hanoverian apathy. Then the technocracies of the future are well-disposed, the most powerful of all, the army and navy show less of that hostility to art found in commerce and the cabinet, and when the war is over they will hardly allow themselves to be quietly deprived of their influence, and handed a gratuity, as before. Revolutions do not happen in this country, but every now and then the public gives a great heave of boredom and impatience and something is done with for ever. When that happens the artist must be on the crest of the wave, not underneath it, for art occupies in society the equivalent of one of those glands the size of a pea on which the proper functioning of the body depends, and whose removal is as easy as it is fatal.

All this has been said before. All this will be said again. It should be said to-morrow.

FREDERIC PROKOSCH

SUNBURNED ULYSSES

Sunburned Ulysses, when he leaned over the water
And heard through the lapping of the waves
That calculating music, heard more than the noise of wind
or the noise of water:

As he strained his ears, he heard the monotonous profound
Music of lost mariners moving landward through the water,
He heard, rising from graves of sand, sea-pitted and sea-
pillared graves,
The sobbing and interminable voices of the drowned.

Scarcely to be grasped as anything other than music,
Being almost wholly woven into the sound of waves, he
heard

Emerging from the crested, sun-dipped lethargy of the
afternoon,

Distinct and terrifying words. Yet not a word
Could he recall—or at least, he never told, being in love
With no one; hard and isolated, in love with change alone,
With a bird's yearning to move seasonally and the sharp,
mean eyes of a bird.

O blacker and deeper than the depths off Portugal,
Some of us have glimpsed that rock, that goddess rising
from the sea,

And as we labor to find for what we were intended,
Slowly, as the spirit is sharpened, the senses are vilified.
Even the sly faces and the weatherbeaten faces, all, all
Are caught and brought to punishment. Though they have
not died,

Their eyes are those of a dead man, or a dead animal.

Black-eyed Ulysses, being an astute and eagle-hearted man,
A heavily loined, lumbering man with a bird's eye and a
bird's unrest,

As he listened and heard through the lapping of the waves
That loud, heart-breaking music, understood. Sweat poured
from his brown chest.

Loving the unattainable and forbidden, in love with change
alone,

He recognized the frightful necessity in the song of the
sirens: for he likewise possessed

Flesh fanned easily into fire, and a heart as hard as a stone.

J. A. SPENDER

LETTER TO
A NEPHEW

MY DEAR STEPHEN,

You ask me to "tell you frankly" what I think about modern poetry. This is rather a deep pit you have dug for me, but I am going to fall headlong into it.

I had an unexpected lesson in literary criticism some weeks ago when reading one of Walter Bagehot's literary essays written in the year 1864. For in it, to my astonishment, he quotes as an example of grotesque ugliness which can only appeal to an "insane taste" that beautiful and moving poem "Holy Cross Day," in which Browning describes the feelings of Jews who on that day in Rome were forced to go to Church and listen to a Christian sermon. It is a poem which comes to life with new and poignant meaning in these times and, if I were a Jew, I should have it by heart as the most profound statement of the Jewish case against the Christian. Yet Bagehot who was an intelligent and highly educated man quotes a large part of it, including the lovely stanzas "Thou if thou wast He who at mid-watch came, By the starlight naming a dubious name," which bring tears to my eyes whenever I recall them, and leaves it without comment as a self-evident example of the wilful grotesque. And over against it he sets the Pied Piper as a perfect specimen of the legitimate "bizarre" and "fanciful" and begs Browning to stick to that in future.

Never again, I said to myself on reading this, would I be tempted to pass judgment on any modern "obscure" poet. Unintelligible as he may be to me, he may have a meaning to other people or a meaning which may come to life at

some future time. So if you ask me what I think about Mr. A's or Mr. B's poems, which you say are very highly thought of by you and friends, I will leave it at that, with just this word of warning. Only a very small fraction of the poems condemned by contemporary critics as grotesque or obscure have succeeded in establishing themselves in this way in after years, and to cultivate the obscure and grotesque on the chance of being one of the survivors may easily be a snare for the young poet. Many young poets in the nineties flattered themselves that because Keats had been killed (if he was) by a Quarterly Reviewer, to be slaughtered by a modern critic would be their passport to immortality. There was unfortunately what logicians called an undistributed middle in this syllogism. The implied middle-term, "I am a budding Keats" was seldom true.

But Bagehot said something else which set me thinking. He said, writing in the early sixties, that poetry was very much "down" at this time. If so, it was very much "up" a few years later. When I began to read poetry in the seventies and eighties there was an established body of poets, Tennyson, Browning, Swinburne, Matthew Arnold, and others not quite in the same rank such as William Morris, Coventry Patmore, Rossetti, Meredith and later Robert Bridges, who between them had a profound influence on reasonably educated people and filtered through these to all classes. We waited breathlessly for their coming volumes, had large chunks of them by heart, quoted them freely, if we were writers, discussed them interminably. They were of all sorts and we could take our choice, sniffing at some, idolising others. Towards the end of the century Francis Thompson and even William Watson carried on the tradition and during and at the end of the war there was a little burst of topical poetry which kept within it. After that it all seemed to fade out, so far as we ordinary folk were concerned. Poetry no longer came to us. If we wanted it, we had to pursue it into backwaters and corners, where it was doing something all by itself.

Now this is a great loss to us, and a great loss, I think,

to the whole country. How has it come about? Is there any way of restoring the communications between poets and public, a public composed of people like myself and my friends? Or do you write us off as old dogs who cannot be taught new tricks? Let me, very diffidently, offer a few comments on this situation.

I read all I can of modern poetry and come to the conclusion that there is no lack of poetic talent. But it seems to live a secretive life, live in the company of like-minded critics, who will not have the communications restored; who praise it for what ordinary folk think to be oddities and obscurities, and decry any lapse into common sentiment—even dismiss as “tosh” and “tripe” things that we sincerely admire. This shuts the door into the ordinary world and encourages what may be called literary in-breeding. One sees groups of young poets constantly imitating one another and confirming one another in what other people think to be eccentricities. Some of these are rather like “signature tunes” on the wireless, noting the fact that the performer belongs to a particular band.

These things irritate. Not infrequently I read a modern poem and am enchanted by it up to the point when it is suddenly defaced by a (to me) unintelligible passage with a verbal ugliness which sets my teeth on edge. The effect on me is as if a schoolboy had suddenly lost his temper and upset the ink over a fair-copy. Some of you seem to me to be dreadfully afraid of being thought pretty or sentimental. There is a superstition in avoiding superstition.

You ask me what I think about the “modern forms,” mainly, I suppose, “free verse.” My difficulty is to ascertain what these “forms” are.

Free verse is a splendid art of which the finest examples are to be found in the English bible and Anglican prayer-book. It is specially suited to prophets, priests and psalmists. To use it for less exalted purposes is quite legitimate, but there are several drawbacks.

For one thing it opens a wide door to impostors and amateurs, who would have been choked off by the discipline

of metre and rhyme. For another, it tempts the new poets to avoid the grind at prosody which must be good even for those who choose in the end to practise free verse.

These are schoolmaster's observations which may (quite properly) be disregarded by genius. The chamois must not be expected to travel by the mule-path. But "free verse" also offers great difficulties to the reader (and possibly to the critic).

It cannot easily be memorised or quoted—in itself a serious obstacle to poetry getting into the language. Quotation of modern poetry which was almost universal among reasonably educated people when I was young, has almost ceased in recent years. The rhyming poets seem to have been quenched by the vogue of free verse; the free versifiers do not capture memory.

There is no agreement about the standards by which free verse should be judged. "Rhythm" is said to be the test, but everyone has his own ideas about it. Does "Rhythm" require me to accept as good poetry what by any other test I should regard as bad prose? A few very good writers may dispense with rules but for the others this freedom is an invitation to anarchy.

You ask me whether I think politics a good subject for poetry. That depends on the poet and what he means by politics. There is of course an immense mass of political poetry of one sort or another. Aeschylus, Euripides, Aristophanes, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Swift, Pope, Akenside, Churchill, Shelley, Byron, Wordsworth, Browning, Swinburne, Thomas Hardy and many other moderns are in one sense or another political poets. But no political poetry really survives unless it has got beyond the politics of the hour and expressed emotions—exaltations, agonies—of which politics are symptoms. So beware of sectarian political poetry. "Left-wing" poetry, Marxist poetry is on a par with Nazi poetry, Nazi science, Nazi art. It is a characteristic totalitarian idea.

I am only a journeyman whose pen has been a tool in the daily work of practical affairs. I have, therefore, no right

to speak dogmatically about the art and craft of imaginative writing. But I am one of a considerable number who look to poetry for comfort and sustenance in these times, and we expect you and your kind to minister to our needs. I would beg you, therefore, to bring your gifts into the open, put aside the theories and sophistications which in recent years have made poetry so much a hole and corner business, and as Burke advised the oligarchs of his time, "identify yourselves, incorporate yourselves" with the main body of your fellow-citizens.

Be pessimistic, if you must, but don't be misanthropic. Man, after all, is the king of beasts, and if you wish to influence him, you must treat him with respect. He "lives by admiration, hope and love"; you must give him something to admire, something to hope for, something to love. I speak as an impenitent traditionalist.

Your affectionate uncle.

WILLIAM R. RODGERS

WAR-TIME

Now all our hurries that hung up on hooks,
And all our heels that idly kicked in halls,
And all our angers that at anchor swung,
And all our youth long tethered to dole-lines,
And all our roots that rotted deep in dump,
Are recollected. In country places
Old men gather the children round them now,
As an old tree, when lopped of every bough,
Gathers the young leaves into itself, a frilled stump.

LAURIE LEE

A MOMENT OF WAR

It is night like a red rag
drawn across the eyes,

the flesh is bitterly pinned
to desperate vigilance,

the blood is stuttering with fear.

O praise the security of worms
and cool crumbs of soil,
flatter the hidden sap
and the lost unfertilized spawn of fish!

The hands melt with weakness
into the gun's hot iron,

the body melts with pity,

the face is braced for wounds,
the odour and the kiss of final pain.

O envy the peace of women
giving birth and love like toys
into the hands of men!

The mouth festers with pale curses,
the bowels struggle like a nest of rats,
the feet wish they were grass
spaced quietly.

O Christ and Mother!

But darkness opens like a knife for you
and you are marked down by your pulsing brain
and isolated,
and your breathing,
your breathing is the blast, the bullet,
and the final sky.

Montpellier.

October, 1937

G. M. BRADY

ON THAT LAST SIGH

On that last sigh
The wind gave issue to another frisk of leaves,
Pale butterflies accepting union
With the mud-brown river,
And there between the flutter and the frequent water
The thought unblossomed round its wintry giver.
Leaves boating at an even tilt,
Light on flux of watery silt,
While on this bank
I trudge through shoals of crispness,
Trying to crush, and feebly failing,
The thought of days when love was idiotic.
To sight each leaf is just a withered skin of veins,
Each leaf that wind had held in sunny poise
When you smiled with your lazy eyes
And my hands freely tugged the summer's reins.
But in quiet stealth it left, you left me,
Why, did you say?
The wind, chill-straining, breathes away a sigh.

ADAM DRINAN

THE GULLS

Learn you from the gulls that squabble on the garbled beach
for offal in sea-rope, sea-straps, sea-tangle sanded:—

Pacific are they also, not a gull wants to fight
but with a kind of gurgle strangled on one note they bluff
fierce beaks agape, like stilted tanks they lurch
turn by turn, each at each that has. Especially
the big proud blackback lords with their arrogant good looks
who snarl so unaristocratically when it's a matter of having,
in a flash as venomously vigilant to assert their rights
as things stunted, subnormal. One peck, one fainted peck
enough

in economic war. First threat gives first title. All scream.
Next threat dispossesses first. All scream. Each to grab
drags the guts a yard in public scream till dispossessed.
The guts have been dragged all over the screaming beach.

None, time to eat;
but public war all morning has been maintained successfully.

Then, equally causeless, public panic. All swirl to sea,
all float

in public silence. Even the timid ones that stood by and did
nothing

take to wing, flee, though now they might have safely fed.
For all there was plenty, yet none had anything at all
and entrails shrivel on hot pebbles under the sun.

F. BUCHANAN

NOT INTO TEMPTATION

Not from the sportive spite against prudery
 And censure: rifling the alms box, betting
 On the tote or behind the henhouse for secrecy,
 Carousing among flat oaths in the pub
 Where the sun still streams through the netting
 On the window whose sill caresses the rain tub
 In the back yard.

But who would not, who
 Would not be saved: not be led not
 Into the temptation to harden the heart,
 Close the mind, clench the fist, blot
 With oaths and curses, crush and subdue
 Above the rooves of the low houses every point, part,
 And departure of lovers' alley and the cemetery
 Wherein the hand behind the light and the darkness
 Coats these things with a kind of charity,
 For ever weighing the young bright dress
 In the window, or the baker's van, or the new paint
 On the municipal paling, (both in those that profess
 Such things as in those that deny by asking questions,)
 Against war, poverty, disease, and death?

And who would not, not only in times full
 Of the week-end on deck or the high school treat,
 But when the tide is distant, the sea faint,
 And the shore dark, muddy, cold, execrable?
 And seeing maybe amid incalculable tensions
 And anxieties the round glory in a rare plaint
 Defeating defeat with its own defeat,
 Defeating the fruit of men's oaths and curses
 Against the hand pulling strings to fill our purses?

PORTRAIT—by *Lucian Freud*



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L. S. LITTLE

JANUARY

Each white field has wallowed
In the transparent slush
Of snow once fastidious, like a snake
In the skin it has sloughed, turned

From the increasing clash
Of its soil with frost to fawn
Upon warmth as its sole baulk.

The softening gash in ice
On the ditch's water foreruns
The unanimous thaw; mobility stretches
Its cramped hands in slow ease

And prises the growing flaw, symbol
Of strength that dissolves
Into determined weakness, yet moves

Everything credulous backwards
To hide its meek furrows, though stones
Lie unevenly in them, like seeds
In an open pod, rebellious at the wide

Grasp of the incautious winter
Which can see in its victim clods
No quick thwart to its malignity.

TERENCE HEYWOOD

NOTES FOR A BESTIARY

(On many farms around certain large cities the pigs are fed on refuse from hotels and restaurants. The smallest piece of their own flesh is enough to cause a disease which renders them unmarketable.)

I hate the cunning mantis, lean, mimetic,
punning on the word prey. Overemphatic
subtlety's distasteful. Give me
the clean transparent pig.

He's no economist—doesn't care a grunt
for the marginal cost of bacon. But his nicety can't
tolerate cannibalism: he learns
his own taste, gets worms.

For man, thrusting his offal in the trusting snout
lays a depth-charge of disease; then hangs round
as aerial convoy. Pig
perishes in smoke and fog.

The cost of bacon rises, ham is dear:
the nicety of pigs has made the poor
hungry. War-lords storm,
boards talk,
halls roar;
while man kills man and eats him as before.

NICHOLAS MOORE

THE LIGHT DAYS

Mr. Dickin followed the mud path, between the rushes and the reeds, or, drier, the path of ferns, and knew the country. The oaks and elms preserved a canopy of silence over his head where the reeds talked, and where the ferns spoke the beeches stood and dropped no sound.

But Mr. Dickin's tongue was angry and he spoke to himself. "You live in a world of windmills" said his tongue.

Along the tops of the dykes the cattle would be driven back and forth and in the marshes below, in summer, the horses would foal, feeding on the damp marsh grasses, which were long and cool as their tails.

Mr. Dickin would walk along the dykes to the windmill. For whichever way one went out into the marsh it led to the windmill. The marsh sucked away at the side of him, warblers moved in the reeds, and now and again a partridge or two would scurry from the clumps of hairy grass. Away to his left lay the sea, and the stony beach before it, where the prickly plants of sea-holly grew.

He had seen the lovers in August making their painful way over the cobbles, far along the beach. Then they would dip into a field among the grasses and lie with the sun on their bodies, unseen to the world, aware only of the earth, each other, and the insects.

But summer had gone now and a light drizzle fell over the country, the air was cold, and snow was in his heart.

He stumbled to the mill, inhabited by mice and the wind. There he would sit and count the carvings on the moss-rotten wood, listen to the wind, and the stories his own tongue would tell him.

In the high summer over the heath he saw the kestrels wheel and he felt the company of the mouse. In the sandy

and peaty turf the rabbits had made their burrows, and badgers moved quietly under cover of the bracken. The heat of the sun frizzled it brown. Over all his world the heather ran, and the smell and warmth of summer made him content.

There had been a day when a mystery had happened. He had seen a wild woman among the furze. But that was long ago.

The heart of the old runs down with the tick of time. Clocks measure out the strength and power of youth, and to the tick of it the old man remembers and regrets, but cannot alter. Even the legends and untrue stories take on a wonderful and petrifying truth.

So at least for Mr. Dickin.

This was about the black days, his tongue told him. Men went about like beasts, living in caves, and tearing the living flesh from fowl and animal: they had hair on their backs and long claws like an eagle's. But the women were beautiful and white. They had no hair on their bodies, they were gentle and mild as does. For a man these creatures would do anything, and lying among the rocks the cruel men would pound their bones to dust, till they lay in a swelter of dust and blood.

Into this mad world a boy was born.

His mother took him down to the rushes in the marsh and hid him there and brought him up on the roots and grasses, so that his body formed freshly and meek. He grew strong and hardy, but though he was strong, his mouth hung gently at his mother's breast, and his strong fingers took hold of her with love.

When he was grown to a young man his mother introduced him to the world she lived in, and the men thought a saviour had come among them. For they wondered at his milk-white body, clear as a woman's but bearing the sign of manhood, and strong as a man's. For when he took hold of a hand the grip showed him to be above all a strong one. Those who tried to look in his eyes wilted before him.

But days came when they were discontent to have him among them and they murmured that the end of the world was near. They thought that they must sacrifice him for their folly.

The light days had not yet come.

So they took him to the sea-shore and told him to lie on the beach in the sun and they brought a beautiful girl to lie with him, and, then, as they were in the midst of their love, they rode out the horses of the marsh to trample him into the sand.

The bodies of the two young people lay smashed and in blood. They brought wood down to the shore, and made the women sing their low, holy songs, as they arranged the wood round the bodies in preparation for a fire. When the flames began to lick round the wood and roast the flesh, the young man turned to the girl and she to him. "My love, this is the world," they said.

But the people, crazy with the fire, danced round them, full with the scent of roasting skin, and they began to rend the hair from their bodies, pulling each other with their fingers, and roaring with pain and ecstasy. The women they took to them and began to eat and love.

Then in the middle of it the fire rose like a cloud into the sky, high up over the sea, and they could see it burning away in the distance.

On the beach the young man and the girl remained in attitudes of love, their bodies perfect, and unscratched.

This is a holy day, said an old man.

The hair fell from his body and the crowd looked at him in wonder.

Then from them too the hair began to fall, until their bodies were naked and white, with a strange new beauty.

Over a carpet of hairs they walked off home.

In the high summer over the heath Mr. Dickin would walk and think of this tale. To what time it belonged he didn't know. His tongue spoke this to him, and it was part of his life by the marsh. "You live in a world of

windmills," it said.

Meeting the lovers walking by the shore or over the dykes he would find their language strange to him. He could not understand the things they said about the world, when they talked to him. His tongue told him different things.

They spoke of war and fear, of people with money, of love, how old was the country, and the life of towns. They looked like people from another world here on the heath or in the marsh. They were cold and beautiful as the sea-holly and quietly spoke of a world they would make, where people would be equal and free, their hands working in the service of no terrible gods, but simply for themselves.

He saw the boy on the beach his tongue told him of, and he felt in the fresh wind from the sea, that this boy here, who had been through so many flames, had come to take the world at last.

CLEMENT GREENBERG

AVANT-GARDE
AND KITSCH

One and the same civilization produces simultaneously two such different things as a poem by T. S. Eliot and a Tin Pan Alley song, or a painting by Braque and a *Saturday Evening Post* cover. All four are on the order of culture, and ostensibly, parts of the same culture and products of the same society. Here, however, their connection seems to end. A poem by Eliot and a poem by Eddie Guest—what perspective of culture is large enough to enable us to situate them in an enlightening relation to each other? Does the fact that a disparity such as this within the frame of a single cultural tradition, is and has been taken for granted—does this fact indicate that the disparity is a part of the natural order of things? Or is it something entirely new, and particular to our age?

The answer involves more than an investigation in aesthetics. It appears to me that it is necessary to examine more closely and with more originality than hitherto the relationship between aesthetic experience as met by the specific—not generalized—individual, and the social and historical contexts in which that experience takes place. What is brought to light will answer, in addition to the question posed above, other and perhaps more important ones.

I.

A society, as it becomes less and less able, in the course of its development, to justify the inevitability of its particular forms, breaks up the accepted notions upon which artists and writers must depend in large part for communication with their audiences. It becomes difficult to assume

anything. All the verities involved by religion, authority, tradition, style, are thrown into question, and the writer or artist is no longer able to estimate the response of his audience to the symbols and references with which he works. In the past such a state of affairs has usually resolved itself into a motionless Alexandrianism, an academicism in which the really important issues are left untouched because they involve controversy, and in which creative activity dwindles to virtuosity in the small details of form, all larger questions being decided by the precedent of the old masters. The same themes are mechanically varied in a hundred different works, and yet nothing new is produced: Statius, mandarin verse, Roman sculpture, Beaux Arts painting, neo-republican architecture.

It is among the hopeful signs in the midst of the decay of our present society that we—some of us—have been unwilling to accept this last phase for our own culture. In seeking to go beyond Alexandrianism, a part of Western bourgeois society has produced something unheard of heretofore: avant-garde culture. A superior consciousness of history—more precisely, the appearance of a new kind of criticism of society, an historical criticism—made this possible. This criticism has not confronted our present society with timeless utopias, but has soberly examined in the terms of history and of cause and effect the antecedents, justifications and functions of the forms that lie at the heart of every society. Thus our present bourgeois social order was shown to be, not an eternal, “natural” condition of life, but simply the latest term in a succession of social orders. New perspectives of this kind, becoming a part of the advanced intellectual conscience of the fifth and sixth decades of the nineteenth century, soon were absorbed by artists and poets, even if unconsciously for the most part. It was no accident, therefore, that the birth of the avant-garde coincided chronologically—and geographically too—with the first bold development of scientific revolutionary thought in Europe.

True, the first settlers of Bohemia—which was then

identical with the avant-garde—turned out soon to be demonstratively uninterested in politics. Nevertheless, without the circulation of revolutionary ideas in the air about them, they would never have been able to isolate their concept of the “bourgeois” in order to define what they were *not*. Nor, without the moral aid of revolutionary political attitudes would they have had the courage to assert themselves as aggressively as they did against the prevailing standards of society. Courage indeed was needed for this, because the avant-garde’s emigration from bourgeois society to Bohemia meant also an emigration from the markets of capitalism, upon which artists and writers had been thrown by the falling away of aristocratic patronage. (Ostensibly, at least, it meant this—meant starving in a garret—although, as will be shown later, the avant-garde remained attached to bourgeois society precisely because it needed its money.)

Yet it is true that once the avant-garde had succeeded in “detaching” itself from society, it proceeded to turn around and repudiate revolutionary politics as well as bourgeois. The revolution was left inside society, a part of that welter of ideological struggle which art and poetry find so unpropitious as soon as it begins to involve those “precious,” axiomatic beliefs upon which culture thus far has had to rest. Hence it was developed that the true and most important function of the avant-garde was not to “experiment,” but to find a path along which it would be possible to keep culture *moving* in the midst of ideological confusion and violence. Retiring from public altogether, the avant-garde poet or artist sought to maintain the high level of his art by both narrowing and raising it to the expression of an absolute in which all relativities and contradictions would be either resolved or beside the point. “Art for art’s sake” and “pure poetry” appear, and subject-matter or content becomes something to be avoided like a plague.

It has been in search of the absolute that the avant-garde has arrived at “abstract” or “non-objective” art—and poetry, too. The avant-garde poet or artist tries in effect to

imitate God by creating something valid solely on its own terms in the way nature itself is valid, in the way a landscape—not its picture—is aesthetically valid; something *given*, increate, independent of meanings, similars, or originals. Content is to be dissolved so completely into form that the work of art or literature cannot be reduced in whole or in part to anything not itself.

But the absolute is absolute, and the poet or artist, being what he is, cherishes certain relative values more than others. The very values in the name of which he invokes the absolute are relative values, the values of aesthetics. And so he turns out to be imitating, not God—and here I use “imitate” in its Aristotelian sense—but the disciplines and processes of art and literature themselves. This is the genesis of the “abstract.”* In turning his attention away from subject-matter or common experience, the poet or artist turns it in upon the medium of his own craft. The non-representational or “abstract,” if it is to have aesthetic validity, cannot be arbitrary and accidental, but must stem from obedience to some worthy constraint or original. This constraint, once the world of common, extraverted experience has been renounced, can only be found in the very processes or disciplines by which art and literature have already imitated the former. These themselves become the

*The example of music, which has long been an abstract art, and which avant-garde poetry has tried so much to emulate, is interesting. Music, Aristotle said curiously enough, is the most imitative and vivid of all the arts because it imitates its original—the state of the soul—with the greatest immediacy. Today this strikes us as the exact opposite of the truth, because no art seems to us to have less reference to something outside itself than music. However, aside from the fact that in a sense Aristotle may still be right, it must be explained that ancient Greek music was closely associated with poetry, and depended upon its character as an accessory to verse to make its imitative meaning clear. Plato, speaking of music, says: “For when there are no words, it is very difficult to recognize the meaning of the harmony and rhythm, or to see that any worthy object is imitated by them.” As far as we know, all music originally served such an accessory function. Once, however, it was abandoned, music was forced to withdraw into itself to find a constraint or original. This it found in the various means of its own composition and performance.

subject matter of art and literature. If, to continue with Aristotle, all art and literature are imitation, then what we have here is the imitation of imitating. To quote Yeats:

“Nor is there singing school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence.”

Picasso, Braque, Mondrian, Miro, Kandinsky, Brancusi, even Klee, Matisse and Cezanne, derive their chief inspiration from the medium they work in.* The excitement of their art seems to lie most of all in its pure preoccupation with the invention and arrangement of spaces, surfaces, shapes, colors, etc., to the exclusion of whatever is not necessarily implicated in these factors. The attention of poets like Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Valéry, Eluard, Pound, Hart Crane, Stevens, even Rilke and Yeats, appears to be centred on the effort to create poetry and on the “moments” themselves of poetic conversion rather than on experience to be converted into poetry. Of course, this cannot exclude other preoccupations in their work, for poetry must deal with words, and words must communicate. Certain poets, such as Mallarmé and Valéry,† are more radical in this respect than others—leaving aside those poets who have tried to compose poetry in pure sound alone. However, if it were easier to define poetry, modern poetry would be much more “pure” and “abstract.” . . . As for the other fields of literature—the definition of avant-garde aesthetics advanced here is no Procrustean bed. But aside from the fact that most of our best contemporary novelists have gone to school with the avant-garde, it is significant that Gide’s most ambitious book is a novel about the writing of a novel, and that Joyce’s *Ulysses* and *Finnegan’s Wake* seem to be above

*I owe this formulation to a remark made by Hans Hofmann, the art-teacher, in one of his lectures. From the point of view of this formulation surrealism in plastic art is a reactionary tendency which is attempting to restore “outside” subject matter. The chief concern of a painter like Dali is to represent the processes and concepts of his consciousness, not the processes of his medium.

†See Valéry’s remarks about his own poetry.

all, as one French critic says, the reduction of experience to expression for the sake of expression, the expression mattering more than what is being expressed.

The avant-garde culture is the imitation of *imitating*—the fact itself—calls for neither approval nor disapproval. It is true that this culture contains within itself some of the very Alexandrianism it seeks to overcome. The lines quoted from Yeats above referred to Byzantium, which is very close to Alexandria; and in a sense this imitation of *imitating* is a superior sort of Alexandrianism. But there is one most important difference: the avant-garde moves, while Alexandrianism stands still. And this, precisely, is what justifies the avant-garde's methods and makes them necessary. The necessity lies in the fact that by no other means is it possible today to create art and literature of a high order. To quarrel with necessity by throwing about terms like "formalism," "purism," "ivory tower" and so forth is either dull or dishonest. This is not to say, however, that it is to the *social* advantage of the avant-garde that it is what it is. Quite the opposite.

The avant-garde's specialization of itself, the fact that its best artists are artists' artists, its best poets, poets' poets, has estranged a great many of those who were capable formerly of enjoying and appreciating ambitious art and literature, but who are now unwilling or unable to acquire an initiation into their craft secrets. The masses have always remained more or less indifferent to culture in the process of development. But today such culture is being abandoned by those to whom it actually belongs—our ruling class. For it is to the latter that the avant-garde belongs. No culture can develop without a social basis, without a source of stable income. And in the case of the avant-garde this was provided by an elite among the ruling class of that society from which it assumed itself to be cut off, but to which it has always remained attached by an umbilical cord of gold. The paradox is real. And now this elite is rapidly shrinking. Since the avant-garde forms the only living culture we now have, the survival in the near future of culture in general is thus

threatened.

We must not be deceived by superficial phenomena and local successes. Picasso's shows still draw crowds, and T. S. Eliot is taught in the universities, the dealers in modernist art are still in business, and the publishers still publish some "difficult" poetry. But the avant-garde itself, already sensing the danger, is becoming more and more timid every day that passes. Academicism and commercialism are appearing in the strangest places. This can mean only one thing: that the avant-garde is becoming unsure of the audience it depends on—the rich and the cultivated.

Is it the nature itself of avant-garde culture that is alone responsible for the danger it finds itself in? Or is that only a dangerous liability? Are there other, and perhaps more important, factors involved?

II.

Where there is an avant-garde, generally we also find a rear-guard. True enough—simultaneously with the entrance of the avant-garde, a second new cultural phenomenon appeared in the industrial West: that thing to which the Germans give the wonderful name of *Kitsch*: popular, commercial art and literature with their chromeotypes, magazine covers, illustrations, ads, slick and pulp fiction, comics, Tin Pan Alley music, tap dancing, Hollywood movies, etc., etc. For some reason this gigantic apparition has always been taken for granted. It is time we looked into its whys and wherefores.

Kitsch is a product of the industrial revolution which urbanized the masses of Western Europe and America and established what is called universal literacy.

Previous to this the only market for formal culture, as distinguished from folk culture, had been among those who in addition to being able to read and write could command the leisure and comfort that always goes hand in hand with cultivation of some sort. This until then had been inextricably associated with literacy. But with the introduction of

universal literacy, the ability to read and write became almost a minor skill like driving a car, and it no longer served to distinguish an individual's cultural inclinations, since it was no longer the exclusive concomitant of refined tastes. The peasants who settled in the cities as proletariat and petty bourgeois learned to read and write for the sake of efficiency, but they did not win the leisure and comfort necessary for the enjoyment of the city's traditional culture. Losing, nevertheless, their taste for the folk culture whose background was the countryside, and discovering a new capacity for boredom at the same time, the new urban masses set up a pressure on society to provide them with a kind of culture fit for their own consumption. To fill the demand of the new market a new commodity was devised: ersatz culture, kitsch, destined for those who, insensible to the values of genuine culture, are hungry nevertheless for the diversion that only culture of some sort can provide.

Kitsch, using for raw material the debased and academicized simulacra of genuine culture, welcomes and cultivates this insensibility. It is the source of its profits. Kitsch is mechanical and operates by formulas. Kitsch is vicarious experience and faked sensations. Kitsch changes according to style, but remains always the same. Kitsch is the epitome of all that is spurious in the life of our times. Kitsch pretends to demand nothing of its customers except their money—not even their time.

The pre-condition for kitsch, a condition without which kitsch would be impossible, is the availability close at hand of a fully matured cultural tradition, whose discoveries, acquisitions and perfected self-consciousness kitsch can take advantage of for its own ends. It borrows from it devices, tricks, stratagems, rules of thumb, themes, converts them into a system and discards the rest. It draws its life blood, so to speak, from this reservoir of accumulated experience. This is what is really meant when it is said that the popular art and literature of today were once the daring, esoteric art and literature of yesterday. Of course, no such thing is true. What is meant is that when enough time has elapsed

the new is looted for new "twists," which are then watered down and served up as kitsch. Self-evidently, all kitsch is academic, and conversely, all that's academic is kitsch. For what is called the academic as such no longer has an independent existence, but has become the stuffed-shirt "front" for kitsch. The methods of industrialism displace the handicrafts.

Because it can be turned out mechanically, kitsch has become an integral part of our productive system in a way in which true culture could never be except accidentally. It has been capitalized at a tremendous investment which must show commensurate returns; it is compelled to extend as well as to keep its markets. While it is essentially its own salesman, a great sales apparatus has nevertheless been created for it, which brings pressure to bear on every member of society. Traps are laid even in those areas, so to speak, that are the preserves of genuine culture. It is not enough today, in a country like ours, to have an inclination towards the latter; one must have a true passion for it that will give him the power to resist the faked article that surrounds and presses in on him from the moment he is old enough to look at the funny papers. Kitsch is deceptive. It has many different levels, and some of them are high enough to be dangerous to the naive seeker of true light. A magazine like the *New Yorker*, which is fundamentally high-class kitsch for the luxury trade, converts and waters down a great deal of avant-garde material for its own uses. Nor is every single item of kitsch altogether worthless. Now and then it produces something of merit, something that has an authentic folk flavor; and these accidental and isolated instances have fooled people who should know better.

Kitsch's enormous profits are a source of temptation to the avant-garde itself, and its members have not always resisted this temptation. Ambitious writers and artists will modify their work under the pressure of kitsch, if they do not succumb to it entirely. And then those puzzling borderline cases appear, such as the popular novelist, Simenon, in

France, and Steinbeck in this country. The net result is always to the detriment of true culture, in any case.

Kitsch has not been confined to the cities in which it was born, but has flowed out over the countryside, wiping out folk culture. Nor has it shown any regard for geographical and national-cultural boundaries. Another mass product of Western industrialism, it has gone on a triumphal tour of the world, crowding out and defacing native cultures in one colonial country after another, so that it is now by way of becoming a universal culture, the first universal culture ever beheld. Today the Chinaman, no less than the South American Indian, the Hindu, no less than the Polynesian, have come to prefer to the products of their native art magazine covers, rotogravure sections and calendar girls. How is this virulence of kitsch, this irresistible attractiveness, to be explained? Naturally, machine-made kitsch can undersell the native handmade article, and the prestige of the West also helps, but why is kitsch a so much more profitable export article than Rembrandt? One, after all, can be reproduced as cheaply as the other.

In his last article on the Soviet cinema in the *Partisan Review*, Dwight Macdonald points out that kitsch has in the last ten years become the dominant culture in Soviet Russia. For this he blames the political regime—not only for the fact that kitsch is the official culture, but also that it is actually the dominant, most popular culture; and he quotes the following from Kurt London's *The Seven Soviet Arts*: “. . . the attitude of the masses both to the old and new art styles probably remains essentially dependent on the nature of the education afforded them by their respective states.” Macdonald goes on to say: “Why after all should ignorant peasants prefer Repin (a leading exponent of Russian academic kitsch in painting) to Picasso, whose abstract technique is at least as relevant to their own primitive folk art as is the former's realistic style? No, if the masses crowd into the Tretyakov (Moscow's museum of contemporary Russian art: kitsch) it is largely because they have been conditioned to shun ‘formalism’ and to admire

‘socialist realism’.”

In the first place it is not a question of a choice between merely the old and merely the new, as London seems to think—but of a choice between the bad, up-to-date old and the genuinely new. The alternative to Picasso is not Michelangelo, but kitsch. In the second place, neither in backward Russia nor in the advanced West do the masses prefer kitsch simply because their governments condition them towards it. Where state educational systems take the trouble to mention art, we are told to respect the old masters, not kitsch; and yet we go and hang Maxfield Parrish or his equivalent on our walls, instead of Rembrandt and Michelangelo. Moreover, as Macdonald himself points out, around 1925 when the Soviet regime was encouraging avant-garde cinema, the Russian masses continued to prefer Hollywood movies. No, “conditioning” does not explain the potency of kitsch. . . .

All values are human values, relative values, in art as well as elsewhere. Yet there does seem to have been more or less of a general agreement among the cultivated of mankind over the ages as to what is good art and what bad. Taste has varied, but not beyond certain limits: contemporary connoisseurs agree with eighteenth century Japanese that Hokusai was one of the greatest artists of his time; we even agree with the ancient Egyptians that Third and Fourth Dynasty art was the most worthy of being selected as their paragon by those who came after. We may have come to prefer Giotto to Raphael, but we still do not deny that Raphael was one of the best painters of his *time*. There has been an agreement then, and this agreement rests, I believe, on a fairly constant distinction made between those values only to be found in art and the values which can be found elsewhere. Kitch, by virtue of rationalized technique that draws on science and industry, has erased this distinction in practice.

Let us see for example what happens when an ignorant Russian peasant such as Macdonald mentions stands with hypothetical freedom of choice before two paintings, one by

Picasso, the other by Repin. In the first he sees, let us say, a play of lines, colors and spaces that represent a woman. The abstract technique—to accept Macdonald's supposition, which I am inclined to doubt—reminds him somewhat of the icons he has left behind him in the village, and he feels the attraction of the familiar. We will even suppose that he faintly surmises some of the great art values the cultivated find in Picasso. He turns next to Repin's picture and sees a battle scene. The technique is not so familiar—as technique. But that weighs very little with the peasant, for he suddenly discovers values in Repin's picture which seem far superior to the values he has been accustomed to finding in icon art; and the unfamiliar technique itself is one of the sources of those values: the values of the vividly recognizable, the miraculous and the sympathetic. In Repin's picture the peasant recognizes and sees things in the way in which he recognizes and sees things outside of pictures—there is no discontinuity between art and life, no need to accept a convention and say to oneself, that icon represents Jesus because it intends to represent Jesus, even if it does not remind me very much of a man. That Repin can paint so realistically that identifications are self-evident immediately and without any effort on the part of the spectator—that is miraculous. The peasant is also pleased by the wealth of self-evident meanings which he finds in the picture: “it tells a story.” Picasso and the icons are so austere and barren in comparison. What is more, Repin heightens reality and makes it dramatic: sunset, exploding shells, running and falling men. There is no longer any question of Picasso or icons. Repin is what the peasant wants, and nothing else but Repin. It is lucky, however, for Repin that the peasant is protected from the products of American capitalism, for he would not stand a chance next to a Saturday Evening Post cover by Norman Rockwell.

Ultimately, it can be said that the cultivated spectator derives the same values from Picasso that the peasant gets from Repin, since what the latter enjoys in Repin is somehow art too, on however low a scale, and he is sent to look

at pictures by the same instincts that send the cultivated spectator. But the ultimate values which the cultivated spectator derives from Picasso are derived at a second remove, as the result of reflection upon the immediate impression left by the plastic values. It is only then that the recognizable, the miraculous and the sympathetic enter. They are not immediately or externally present in Picasso's painting, but must be projected into it by the spectator sensitive enough to react sufficiently to plastic qualities. They belong to the "reflected" effect. In Repin, on the other hand, the "reflected" effect has already been included in the picture, ready for the spectator's unreflective enjoyment.* Where Picasso paints *cause*, Repin paints *effect*. Repin pre-digests art for the spectator and spares him effort, provides him with a short cut to the pleasure of art that detours what is necessarily difficult in genuine art. Repin,† or kitsch, is synthetic art.

The same point can be made with respect to kitsch literature: it provides vicarious experience for the insensitive with far greater immediacy than serious fiction can hope to do. And Eddie Guest and the *Indian Love Lyrics* are more poetic than T. S. Eliot and Shakespeare.

III.

If the avant-garde imitates the processes of art, kitsch, we now see, imitates its effects. The neatness of this antithesis

*T. S. Eliot said something to the same effect in accounting for the shortcomings of English Romantic poetry. Indeed, the Romantics can be considered the original sinners whose guilt kitsch inherited. They showed kitsch how. What does Keats write about mainly, if not the effect of poetry upon himself?

†Repin having been more or less thrust into my hands as an example, I am afraid that I have been too harsh with him in that I pile all the sins of kitsch on his head. Actually, Repin had great natural talents, and it is unfortunate that he allowed—or rather, that his age allowed—the literary notions of the Delacroix, Vernet, etc., school of historical painting to come between his eyes and the canvas. A contemporary Russian painter such as Gerassimov would have served my purpose with more propriety.

is more than contrived; it corresponds to and defines the tremendous interval that separates from each other two such simultaneous cultural phenomena as the avant-garde and kitsch. This interval, too great to be closed by all the infinite gradations of popularized "modernism" and "modernistic" kitsch, corresponds in turn to a social interval, a social interval that has always existed in formal culture as elsewhere in civilized society, and whose two termini converge and diverge in fixed relation to the increasing or decreasing stability of the given society. There has always been on one side the minority of the powerful—and therefore the cultivated—and on the other the great mass of the exploited and poor—and therefore the ignorant. Formal culture has always belonged to the first, while the last have had to content themselves with folk or rudimentary culture, or kitsch.

In a stable society which functions well enough to hold in solution the contradictions between its classes the cultural dichotomy becomes somewhat blurred. The axioms of the few are shared by the many; the latter believe superstitiously what the former believe soberly. And at such moments in history the masses are able to feel wonder and admiration for the culture, on no matter how high a plane, of its masters. This applies at least to plastic culture, which is accessible to all.

In the Middle Ages the plastic artist paid lip service at least to the lowest common denominators of experience. This even remained true to some extent until the seventeenth century. There was available for imitation a universally valid conceptual reality, whose order the artist could not tamper with. The subject matter of art was prescribed by those who commissioned works of art, which were not created, as in bourgeois society, on speculation. Precisely because his content was determined in advance, the artist was free to concentrate on his medium. He needed not to be philosopher or visionary, but simply artificer. As long as there was general agreement as to what were the worthiest subjects for art, the artist was relieved of the necessity to

be original and inventive in his "matter" and could devote all his energy to formal problems. For him the medium became, privately, professionally, the content of his art, even as today his medium is the public content of the abstract painter's art—with that difference, however, that the medieval artist had to suppress his professional preoccupation in public—had always to suppress and subordinate the personal and professional in the finished, official work of art. If, as an ordinary member of the Christian community, he felt some personal emotion about his subject matter, this only contributed to the enrichment of the work's public meaning. Only with the Renaissance do the inflections of the personal become legitimate, still to be kept, however, within the limits of the simply and universally recognizable. And only with Rembrandt do "lonely" artists begin to appear, lonely in their art.

But even during the Renaissance, and as long as Western art was endeavoring to perfect its technique, victories in this realm could only be signalized by success in realistic imitation, since there was no other objective criterion at hand. Thus the masses could still find in the art of their masters objects of admiration and wonder. Even the bird who pecked at the fruit in Zeuxes' picture could applaud.

It is a platitude that art becomes caviar to the general when the reality it imitates no longer corresponds even roughly to the reality recognized by the general. Even then, however, the resentment the common man may feel is silenced by the awe in which he stands of the patrons of this art. Only when he becomes dissatisfied with the social order they administer does he begin to criticize their culture. Then the plebeian finds courage for the first time to voice his opinions openly. Every man, from Tammany aldermen to Austrian house-painters, finds that he is entitled to his opinion. Most often this resentment towards culture is to be found where the dissatisfaction with society is a reactionary dissatisfaction which expresses itself in revivalism and puritanism, and latest of all, in fascism. Here revolvers and torches begin to be mentioned in the same breath as

culture. In the name of godliness or the blood's health, in the name of simple ways and solid virtues, the statue-smashing commences.

IV.

Returning to our Russian peasant for the moment, let us suppose that after he has chosen Repin in preference to Picasso, the state's educational apparatus comes along and tells him that he is wrong, that he should have chosen Picasso—and shows him why. It is quite possible for the Soviet state to do this. But things being as they are in Russia—and everywhere else—the peasant soon finds that the necessity of working hard all day for his living and the rude, uncomfortable circumstances in which he lives do not allow him enough leisure, energy and comfort to train for the enjoyment of Picasso. This needs, after all, a considerable amount of “conditioning.” Superior culture is one of the most artificial of all human creations, and the peasant finds no “natural” urgency within himself that will drive him towards Picasso in spite of all difficulties. In the end the peasant will go back to kitsch when he feels like looking at pictures, for he can enjoy kitsch without effort. The state is helpless in this matter and remains so as long as the problems of production have not been solved in a socialist sense. The same holds true, of course, for capitalist countries and makes all talk of art for the masses there nothing but demagoguery.*

Where today a political regime establishes an official cultural policy, it is for the sake of demagoguery. If kitsch is the

*It will be objected that such art for the masses as folk art was developed under rudimentary conditions of production—and that a good deal of folk art is on a high level. Yes, it is—but folk art is not Athene, and it's Athene whom we want: formal culture with its infinity of aspects, its luxuriance, its large comprehension. Besides, we are now told that most of what we consider good in folk culture is the static survival of dead formal, aristocratic, cultures. Our old English ballads, for instance, were not created by the “folk,” but by the post-feudal squirearchy of the English countryside, to survive in the mouths of the folk long after those for whom the ballads were composed had gone on to other forms of literature. . . . Unfortunately,

official tendency of culture in Germany, Italy and Russia, it is not because their respective governments are controlled by philistines, but because kitsch is the culture of the masses in these countries, as it is everywhere else. The encouragement of kitsch is merely another of the inexpensive ways in which totalitarian regimes seek to ingratiate themselves with their subjects. Since these regimes cannot raise the cultural level of the masses—even if they wanted to—by anything short of a surrender to international socialism, they will flatter the masses by bringing all culture down to their level. It is for this reason that the avant-garde is outlawed, and not so much because a superior culture is inherently a more critical culture. (Whether or not the avant-garde could possibly flourish under a totalitarian regime is not pertinent to the question at this point.) As matter of fact, the main trouble with avant-garde art and literature, from the point of view of Fascists and Stalinists, is not that they are too critical, but that they are too “innocent,” that it is too difficult to inject effective propaganda into them, that kitsch is more pliable to this end. Kitsch keeps a dictator in closer contact with the “soul” of the people. Should the official culture be one superior to the general mass-level, there would be a danger of isolation.

Nevertheless, if the masses were conceivably to ask for avant-garde art and literature, Hitler, Mussolini and Stalin would not hesitate long in attempting to satisfy such a demand. Hitler is a bitter enemy of the avant-garde, both on doctrinal and personal grounds, yet this did not prevent Goebbels in 1932-33 from strenuously courting avant-garde artists and writers. When Gottfried Benn, an Expressionist poet, came over to the Nazis he was welcomed with a great

until the machine age culture was the exclusive prerogative of a society that lived by the labor of serfs or slaves. They were the real symbols of culture. For one man to spend time and energy creating or listening to poetry meant that another man had to produce enough to keep himself alive and the former in comfort. In Africa to-day we find that the culture of slave-owning tribes is generally much superior to that of the tribes which possess no slaves.

fanfare, although at that very moment Hitler was denouncing Expressionism as *Kulturbolschewismus*. This was at a time when the Nazis felt that the prestige which the avant-garde enjoyed among the cultivated German public could be of advantage to them, and practical considerations of this nature, the Nazis being the skilful politicians they are, have always taken precedence over Hitler's personal inclinations. Later the Nazis realized that it was more practical to accede to the wishes of the masses in matters of culture than to those of their paymasters; the latter, when it came to a question of preserving power, were as willing to sacrifice their culture as they were their moral principles, while the former, precisely because power was being withheld from them, had to be cozened in every other way possible. It was necessary to promote on a much more grandiose style than in the democracies the illusion that the masses actually rule. The literature and art they enjoy and understand were to be proclaimed the only true art and literature and any other kind was to be suppressed. Under these circumstances people like Gottfried Benn, no matter how ardently they support Hitler, become a liability; and we hear no more of them in Nazi Germany.

We can see then that although from one point of view the personal philistinism of Hitler and Stalin is not accidental to the political roles they play, from another point of view it is only an incidentally contributory factor in determining the cultural policies of their respective regimes. Their personal philistinism simply adds brutality and double-darkness to policies they would be forced to support anyhow by the pressure of all their other policies—even were they, personally, devotees of avant-garde culture. What the acceptance of the isolation of the Russian Revolution forces Stalin to do, Hitler is compelled to do by his acceptance of the contradictions of capitalism and his efforts to freeze them. As for Mussolini—his case is a perfect example of the *disponibilité* of a realist in these matters. For years he bent a benevolent eye on the Futurists and built modernistic railroad stations and government-owned

apartment houses. One can still see in the suburbs of Rome more modernistic apartments than almost anywhere else in the world. Perhaps Fascism wanted to show its up-to-datedness, to conceal the fact that it was a retrogression; perhaps it wanted to conform to the tastes of the wealthy *élite* it served. At any rate Mussolini seems to have realized lately that it would be more useful to him to please the cultural tastes of the Italian masses than those of their masters. The masses must be provided with objects of admiration and wonder; the latter can dispense with them. And so we find Mussolini announcing a "new Imperial style." Marinetti, Chirico, et al. are sent into the outer darkness, and the new railroad station in Rome will not be modernistic. That Mussolini was late in coming to this only illustrates again the relative hesitancy with which Italian fascism has drawn the necessary implications of its role. . . .

Capitalism in decline finds that whatever of quality it is still capable of producing becomes almost invariably a threat to its own existence. Advances in culture no less than advances in science and industry corrode the very society under whose aegis they are made possible. Here, as in every other question today, it becomes necessary to quote Marx word for word. Today we no longer look towards socialism for a new culture—as inevitably as one will appear, once we do have socialism. Today we look to socialism *simply* for the preservation of whatever living culture we have right now.

V. S. PRITCHETT

THE SAINT

When I was seventeen years old I lost my religious faith. It had been unsteady for some time and then, very suddenly, it went as the result of an incident in a punt on the river outside the town where we lived. My father was a small furniture manufacturer in the place, always in difficulties about money but convinced that in some way God would help him. And this happened. An investor arrived who belonged to a sect called the Church of the Last Purification, of Toronto, Canada. Could we imagine, this man asked, a good and omnipotent God allowing his children to be short of money? We had to admit we could not imagine this. The man paid in the money and we were converted. Our family were the first Purifiers—as they were called—in the town. Soon a congregation of fifty or more were meeting every Sunday in a room at the Corn Exchange.

At once we found ourselves isolated and hated people. Everyone made jokes about us. We had to stand together because we were sometimes dragged into the courts. What the unconverted could not forgive in us was first that we believed in successful prayer and, secondly, that our revelation came from Toronto. The success of our prayers had a simple foundation. We regarded it as "Error"—our name for Evil—to believe the evidence of our senses and if we had influenza or consumption, or had lost our money or were unemployed, we denied the reality of these things, saying that since God could not have made them they therefore did not exist. It was exhilarating to look at our congregation and to know that what the vulgar would call miracles were performed among us, almost as a matter of routine, every day. Not very big miracles, perhaps; but up in London and out in Toronto, we knew that deafness and blindness, cancer and insanity, the great scourges, were

constantly vanishing before the prayers of the more advanced Purifiers.

"What!" said my schoolmaster, an Irishman with eyes like broken glass and a sniff of irritability in the bristles of his nose. "What! do you have the impudence to tell me that if you fell off the top floor of this building and smashed your head in you would say you hadn't fallen and were not injured?"

I was a small boy and very afraid of everybody but not when it was a question of my religion. I was used to the kind of conundrum the Irishman had set.

"I *would* say so," I replied with coldness and some vanity, "and my head would not be smashed."

"You would not say so," answered the Irishman, "You would not say so." His eyes sparkled with pure pleasure. "You'd be dead."

The boys laughed but they looked at me with admiration.

Then, I do not know how or why, I began to see a difficulty. Without warning and as if I had gone into my bedroom at night and had found a gross ape seated in my bed and thereafter following me about with his grunts and his fleas and a look relentless and ancient scored on his brown face, I was faced with the problem which prowls at the centre of all religious faith. I was faced by the difficulty of the origin of evil. It was an illusion, we were taught. But even illusions have an origin. The Purifiers denied this.

I consulted my father. Trade was bad at the time and this made his faith peremptory. He frowned as I spoke.

"When did you brush your coat last?" he said. "You're getting slovenly about your appearance. If you spent more time studying the books"—that is to say, the Purification literature—"and less with your hands in your pockets and playing about with boats on the river, you wouldn't be letting Error in."

All dogmas have their jargon; my father as a business man loved the trade terms of the Purification. "Don't let Error in" was a favourite one. The whole point about the Purification, he said, was that it was scientific and therefore

exact; in consequence it was sheer weakness to admit discussion. Indeed, betrayal. He unpinched his pince-nez, stirred his tea and indicated I must submit or change the subject. Preferably the latter. I saw, to my alarm, that my arguments had defeated my father. Faith and doubt pulled like strings round my throat.

"You don't mean to say you don't believe that what our Lord said was true?" my mother asked nervously following me out of the room. "Your dad does, dear."

I could not answer. I went out of the house and down the main street to the river where the punts were stuck like insects in the summery flash of the reach. Life was a dream, I thought; no, a nightmare, for the ape was beside me.

I was still in this state, half sulking and half exalted, when Mr. Hubert Timberlake came to the town. He was one of the important people from the headquarters of our Church and he had come to give an address on the Purification at the Corn Exchange. Posters announcing this were everywhere. Mr. Timberlake was to spend Sunday afternoon with us. It was unbelievable that a man so eminent would actually sit in our dining room, use our knives and forks, and eat our food. Every imperfection in our home and our characters would jump out at him. The Truth had been revealed to man with scientific accuracy—an accuracy we could all test by experiment—and the future course of human development on earth was laid down, with finality. And here in Mr. Timberlake was a man who had not merely performed many miracles—even, as it was said, with proper reserve, having twice raised the dead—but who had actually been to Toronto, our headquarters, where this great and revolutionary revelation had first been given.

"This is my son," my father said introducing me. "He thinks, he thinks, Mr. Timberlake, but I tell him he only thinks he does ha, ha." My father was a humorous man. "He's always on the river," my father continued. "I tell him he's got water on the brain. I've been telling Mr. Timberlake about you, my boy."

A hand as soft as the best quality chamois leather took

mine. I saw a wide upright man in a double-breasted navy blue suit. He had a pink square head with very small ears and one of those torpid, enamelled smiles which were so common in our sect.

"Why, isn't that just fine?" said Mr. Timberlake dryly. Owing to his contacts with Toronto he spoke with an American accent. "What say we tell your father it's funny he thinks he's funny."

The eyes of Mr. Timberlake were direct and colourless. He had the look of a retired merchant captain who had become decontaminated from the sea and had reformed and made money. His defence of me had made me his at once. My doubts vanished. Whatever Mr. Timberlake believed must be true and as I listened to him at lunch I thought there could be no finer life than his.

"I expect Mr. Timberlake's tired after his address," said my mother.

"Tired?" exclaimed my father brilliant with indignation. "How can Mr. Timberlake be tired? Don't let Error in!"

For the merely inconvenient in our faith was just as illusory as a great catastrophe would have been, if you wished to be strict, and Mr. Timberlake's presence made us so.

I noticed then that, after their broad smiles, Mr. Timberlake's lips had the habit of setting into a long depressed sarcastic curve.

"I guess," he drawled, "I guess the Almighty must have been tired sometimes for it says He relaxed on the seventh day. Say, do you know what I'd like to do this afternoon?" he said turning to me. "While your father and mother are sleeping off this loin of pork let's you and me go on the river and get water on the brain. I'll show you how to punt."

Mr. Timberlake, I saw to my disappointment, was out to show he understood the young. I saw he was planning "a quiet talk" with me about my problems.

"There are too many people on the river on Sundays," said my father uneasily.

"Oh, I like a crowd," said Mr. Timberlake giving my father a tough look. "This is the day of rest, you know." He had had my father gobbling up every bit of gossip from the sacred city of Toronto all the morning.

My parents were incredulous that a man like Mr. Timberlake should go out among the blazers and gramophones of the river on a Sunday afternoon. In any other member of our church they thought this would be sin.

"Waal, what say?" said Mr. Timberlake. I could only murmur.

"That's fixed," said Mr. Timberlake. And on came the smile as simple, vivid and unanswerable as the smile on an advertisement. "Isn't that just fine!"

Mr. Timberlake went upstairs to wash his hands. My father was deeply offended and shocked but he could say nothing. He unpinched his glasses.

"A very wonderful man," he said. "So human," he apologised.

"My boy," my father said, "this is going to be an experience for you. Hubert Timberlake was making a thousand a year in the insurance business ten years ago. Then he heard of the Purification. He threw everything up, just like that. He gave up his job and took up the work. It was a struggle, he told me so himself this morning. 'Many's the time,' he said to me this morning, 'when I wondered where my next meal was coming from.' But the way was shown. He came down from Worcester to London and in two years he was making fifteen hundred a year out of his practice."

To heal the sick by prayer according to the tenets of the Church of the Last Purification was Mr. Timberlake's profession.

My father lowered his eyes. With his glasses off the lids were small and uneasy. He lowered his voice too.

"I have told him about your little trouble," my father said quietly with emotion. I was burned with shame. My father looked up and stuck out his chin confidently.

"He just simply smiled," my father said. "That's all."

Then we waited for Mr. Timberlake to come down.

I put on white flannels at my father's request, and soon I was walking down to the river with Mr. Timberlake. I felt that I was going with him under false pretences; for he would begin explaining to me the origin of evil and I would have to pretend politely that he was converting me when already, at the first sight of him, I had believed. A stone bridge whose two arches seem like an owl's pair of eyes gazing up the reach, crosses the river at the landing stage and I thought as I got the tickets for our punt that it was a pity the flannelled men and the sun-burned girls there did not know that this man in the navy blue suit, the bowler hat and the brown boots was *the* Mr. Timberlake who had been speaking in the town that very morning. I looked round for him and when I saw him I was a little startled. He was standing at the edge of the water looking at it with an expression of empty incomprehension. Among the white crowds his air of brisk efficiency had gone. He looked middle-aged, lonely and insignificant. But the smile switched on when he saw me. He was God's sales manager once more.

"Ready?" he called. "Fine!"

I had the feeling that inside him there must be a gramophone record that went round and round inside him, stopping at that word.

He stepped into the punt and at once took charge.

"Now I want you to paddle us over to the far bank," he said, "and then I'll show you how to punt."

Everything that Mr. Timberlake said still seemed unreal to me. The fact that he was sitting in a punt of all commonplace material things was incredible. That he should propose to pole us up the river was terrifying. Suppose he fell into the river? At once I checked the thought. A leader of our church under the direct guidance of God could not possibly fall into the river.

The stream is wide and deep in this reach but on the southern bank there is a manageable depth and a hard bottom. Over the clay banks the willows hang making their

basket work print of sun and shadow on the water, while under the gliding boat lie cloudy, chloride caverns. The hoop-like branches of the trees bend down until their tips touch the water like fingers making musical sounds. Ahead in midstream, on a day sunny as this one was, there is a path of strong light which is hard to look at unless you half close your eyes, and down this path on the crowded Sundays, go the launches with their parasols and their pennants and also the rowing boats with their beetle-leg oars which seem to dig the sunlight out of the water as they rise. Upstream one goes, on and on, between gardens and then between fields kept for grazing. On the afternoon when Mr. Timberlake and I went out to settle the question of the origin of evil, the meadows were packed densely with buttercups.

"Now," said Mr. Timberlake decisively, when I had paddled to the other side. "Now I'll take her."

He got over the seat into the well at the stern.

"I'll just get you clear of the trees," I said.

"Give me the pole," said Mr. Timberlake, standing up on the little platform and making a squeak with his boots as he did so. "Thank you, sir. I haven't done this for eighteen years but I can tell you, my lord, in those days I was considered some poler."

He looked around and let the pole slide down through his hands. Then he gave the first, difficult push. The punt rocked pleasantly and we moved forward. I sat facing him, paddle in hand, to check any inward drift of the punt.

"How's that, you guys?" said Mr. Timberlake, looking round at our eddies and drawing in the pole. The water sished down it.

"Fine," I said. Deferentially I had caught the word.

He went on to his second and third strokes, taking too much water on his sleeve, perhaps, and uncertain in his steering, which I corrected, but he was doing well.

"It comes back to me," he said. "How am I doing?"

"Just keep her out from the trees," I said.

"The trees?" he asked.

"The willows," I replied.

"I'll do it now," he said. "How's that? Not quite enough? Well, how's this?"

"Another one," I said. "The current runs strong this side."

"What? More trees?" he exclaimed. He was getting hot.

"We can shoot out past them," I answered. "I'll ease us over with the paddle."

Mr. Timberlake did not like this suggestion.

"No, don't do that. I can manage it," he said.

I did not want to offend one of the leaders of our Church, so I put the paddle down; but I felt I ought to have taken him further along, away from the irritation of the trees.

"Of course," I said, "we could go under them. It might be nice."

"I think," said Mr. Timberlake, "that would be a very good idea, my lord."

He lunged hard on the pole and took us towards the next archway of willow branches.

"We may have to duck a bit, that's all," I said.

"Oh I can push the branches up," replied Mr. Timberlake.

"It is better to duck," I said.

We were gliding now quickly towards the arch, in fact I was already under it.

"I think I should duck," I said. "Just bend down for this one."

"What makes the trees lean over the water like this?" asked Mr. Timberlake. "Weeping willows—I'll give you a thought there. How Error likes to make us dwell on sorrow. Why not call them *laughing* willows?" discoursed Mr. Timberlake as the branch passed over my head.

"Duck," I said.

"Where? I don't see them," said Mr. Timberlake, turning round.

"No, your head," I said. "The branch," I called.

"Oh, the branch. This one?" said Mr. Timberlake, finding a branch just against his chest, and he put out a hand

to lift it. It is not easy to lift a willow branch and Mr. Timberlake was surprised. He stepped back as it gently and firmly leaned against him. He leaned back and pushed from his feet. And he pushed too far. The boat went on. I saw Mr. Timberlake's boots leave the stern as he took an unthoughtful step backwards. He made a last-minute grab at a stronger and higher branch; and then, there he hung a yard above the water, round as a blue damson that is ripe and ready, waiting only for a touch to make it fall. Too late with the paddle and shot ahead by the force of his thrust, I could not save him.

For a full minute I did not believe what I saw; indeed our religion taught us not to believe what we saw. Unbelieving I could not move. I gaped. The impossible had happened. Only a miracle, I found myself saying, could save him.

What was most striking was the silence of Mr. Timberlake as he hung from the bough. I was lost between gazing at him and trying to get the punt out of the small branches of the tree. By the time I had got the punt out there were several yards of water between us and the soles of his boots were very near the water as the branch bent under his weight. Boats were passing at the time but no one seemed to notice us. I was glad about this. This was a private agony. The face of Mr. Timberlake was thickened but not empurpled and it was squeezed between his shoulders and his hanging arms. I saw him blink and look up at the sky. His eyelids were pale like a chicken's. He was tidy and dignified as he hung there, the hat was not displaced and the top button of his coat was done up. He had a blue silk handkerchief in his breast pocket. So unperturbed and genteel he seemed that as the tip of his shoes came nearer and nearer to the water, I became alarmed. He could perform what are called miracles. He would be thinking at this moment that only in an erroneous and illusory sense was he hanging from the branch of the tree over six feet of water. He was probably praying one of the closely reasoned prayers of our faith which were more like conversations with

Euclid than with God. The calm of his face suggested this. Was he (I asked myself) within sight of the main road, the town Recreation Ground, and the landing stage crowded with people, was he about to re-enact a well-known miracle? I hoped that he was not. I prayed that he was not. I prayed with all my will that Mr. Timberlake would not walk upon the water. It was my prayer and not his that was answered.

I saw the shoes dip, the water rise above his ankles and up his socks. He tried to move his grip now to a yet higher branch—he did not succeed—and in making this effort his coat and waistcoat rose and parted from his trousers. A seam of shirt with its pant loops and brace tabs broke like a crack across the middle of Mr. Timberlake. It was like a fatal flaw in a statue, an earthquake crack which made the monumental mortal. The last Greeks must have felt as I felt then when they saw a split across the middle of some statue of Apollo. It was at this moment that I realised that the final revelation about man and society on earth had come to nobody and that Mr. Timberlake knew nothing at all about the origin of evil.

All this takes long to describe but it happened in a few seconds as I paddled towards him. I was too late to get his feet on the boat and the only thing to do was to let him sink until his hands were nearer the level of the punt and then to get him to change hand holds. Then I would paddle him ashore. I did this. Amputated by the water, first a torso, then a bust, then a mere head and shoulders, Mr. Timberlake, I noticed, looked sad and lonely as he sank. He was a declining dogma. As the water lapped his collar—for he hesitated to let go of the branch to hold the punt—I saw a small triangle of deprecation and pathos between his nose and the corners of his mouth. The head resting on the platter of water had the sneer of calamity on it, such as one sees in the pictures of a beheaded saint.

“Hold on to the punt, Mr. Timberlake,” I said urgently. “Hold on to the punt.”

He did so.

“Push from behind,” he directed in a dry business-like

voice. They were his first words. I obeyed him.

Carefully I paddled him towards the bank. He turned and, with a splash, climbed ashore. There he stood, raising his arms and looking at the water running down his swollen suit and making a puddle at his feet.

"Say," said Mr. Timberlake coldly. "We let some Error in that time."

How much he must have hated our family.

"I am sorry, Mr. Timberlake," I said. "I am most awfully sorry. I should have paddled. It was my fault. I'll get you home at once. Let me wring out your coat and waistcoat. You'll catch your death . . ."

I stopped. I had nearly blasphemed. I had nearly suggested that Mr. Timberlake had fallen into the water and that to a man of his age this might be dangerous.

Mr. Timberlake corrected me. His voice was impersonal addressing the laws of human existence rather than myself.

"If God made water it would be ridiculous to suggest He made it capable of harming his other creatures. Wouldn't it?"

"Yes," I murmured hypocritically.

"O.K." said Mr. Timberlake. "Let's go."

"I'll soon get you across," I said.

"No," he said, "I mean let's go on. We're not going to let a little thing like this spoil a beautiful afternoon. Where were we going? You spoke of a pretty landing place farther on. Let's go there."

"But I must take you home. You can't sit there soaked to the skin. It will spoil your clothes."

"Now, now," said Mr. Timberlake, "do as I say. Go on."

There was nothing to be done with him. I held the punt into the bank and he stepped in. He sat like a bursting and sodden bolster in front of me while I paddled. We had lost the pole of course.

For a long time I could hardly look at Mr. Timberlake. He was taking the line that nothing had happened and this put me at a disadvantage. I knew something considerable

had happened. That glaze, which so many of the members of our sect had on their faces and persons, their minds and manners, had been washed off. There was no gleam for me from Mr. Timberlake.

"What's that house over there?" he asked. He was making conversation. I had steered into the middle of the river to get him into the strong sun. I saw steam rise from him.

I took courage and studied him. He was a man, I realised, in poor physical condition, unexercised and sedentary. I remember he had said at lunch:

"A young woman I know said, 'Isn't it wonderful. I can walk thirty miles a day without being in the least tired.' I said, 'I do not see that bodily indulgence is anything a member of the Church of the Last Purification should boast about.'"

Yes, there was something flaccid, passive and slack about Mr. Timberlake. Bunched in swollen clothes, he refused to take them off. It came to me as he looked with boredom at the water, the passing boats and the country, that he had not been in the country before. That it was something he had agreed to do but wanted to get over quickly. He was totally uninterested. By his questions: What is that church? Are there any fish in this river? Is that a wireless or a gramophone? I understood that Mr. Timberlake was politely and formally acknowledging a world he did not live in. It was too interesting, too eventful. His spirit, inert and preoccupied, was elsewhere in an eventless and immaterial habitation. He was a dull man, duller than any man I have ever known; but his dullness was a sort of earthly deposit left by a being whose mind was engrossed in abstract matters. There was a slightly pettish look on his face as (to himself, of course) he declared he was not wet and that he would not catch pneumonia.

Mr. Timberlake spoke little. Sometimes he squeezed water out of his sleeve. He shivered a little. He watched his steam. I had planned when we set out to go up as far as the lock, but now the thought of another two miles of

this responsibility was too much. I pretended I wanted to go only as far as the bend which we were approaching, where one of the richest buttercup meadows was. I mentioned this to him. He turned and looked with boredom at the field. Slowly we came to the bank.

We tied up the punt and we landed.

"Fine," said Mr. Timberlake. He stood at the edge of the meadow just as he had stood at the landing stage—lost, stupefied, uncomprehending.

"Nice to stretch our legs," I said. I led the way into the deep flowers. So dense were the buttercups there was hardly any green. Presently I sat down. Mr. Timberlake looked at me and sat down also. Then I turned to him with a last try at persuasion. Respectability, I was sure, was his trouble.

"No one will see us," I said. "This is out of sight of the river. Take off your coat and trousers and ring them out."

Mr. Timberlake replied firmly.

"I am satisfied to remain as I am."

"What is this flower?" he asked to change the subject.

"Buttercup," I said.

"Of course," he replied.

I could do nothing with him. I lay down full length in the sun and, observing this and thinking to please me, Mr. Timberlake did the same. He must have supposed that this was what I had come out in the boat to do. It was only human. He had come out with me, I saw, to show that he was human.

But as we lay there I saw the steam still rising. I had had enough.

"A bit hot," I said, getting up.

He got up at once.

"Do you want to sit in the shade," he asked politely.

"No," I said. "Would you like to?"

"No," he said, "I was thinking of you."

"Let's go back," I said. We both stood up and I let him pass in front of me. When I looked at him again I

stopped dead. Mr. Timberlake was no longer a man in a navy blue suit. He was blue no longer. He was transfigured. He was yellow. He was covered with buttercup pollen, a fine yellow paste of it made by the damp, from head to foot.

"Your suit," I said.

He looked at it. He raised his thin eyebrows a little, but he did not smile or make any comment.

The man is a saint, I thought. As saintly as any of those gold leaf figures in the churches of Sicily. Golden he sat in the punt; golden he sat for the next hour as I paddled him down the river. Golden and bored. Golden as we landed at the town and as we walked up the street back to my parents' house. There he refused to change his clothes or to sit by a fire. He kept an eye on the time for his train back to London. By no word did he acknowledge the disasters or the beauties of the world. If they were printed upon him it was as upon a husk.

Sixteen years have passed since I dropped Mr. Timberlake in the river and since the sight of his pant loops destroyed my faith. I have not seen him since, and today I heard that he was dead. He was fifty-seven. His mother, a very old lady with whom he had lived all his life, went into his bedroom when he was getting ready for church and found him lying on the floor in his shirtsleeves. A stiff collar with the tie half inserted was in one hand. Five minutes before, she told the doctor, she had been speaking to him.

The doctor who looked at the heavy body lying on the single bed, saw a middle-aged man, wide rather than stout and with an extraordinarily broad, box-like, thick-jawed face. He had got fat, my father told me, in later years. The heavy liver-coloured cheeks were like the chaps of a hound. Heart disease, it was plain, was the cause of the death of Mr. Timberlake. In death the face was lax, even coarse and degenerate. It was a miracle, the doctor said, that he had lived as long. Any time during the last twenty years a sudden shock might have killed him.

I thought of our afternoon on the river. I thought of him hanging from the tree. I thought of him, indifferent

and golden, in the meadow. I understood why he had made for himself a protective, sedentary blandness, an automatic smile, a collection of phrases. He kept them on like the coat after his ducking. And I understood why—though I had feared it all the time we were on the river—I understood why he did not talk to me about the origin of evil. He was honest. The ape was with us. The ape that merely followed me was already inside Mr. Timberlake eating at his heart.

MONTGOMERY BELGION

FRENCH CHRONICLE

In France the award of the Prix Goncourt—the oldest of the French literary prizes—is enough to establish a novelist. But seldom has the prize been awarded for a first novel. Either it has rescued from obscurity some deserving provincial who for years had been writing and publishing quietly, or else it has put the seal on the notoriety of some man already well known in the metropolis—the author perhaps of the outstanding novel of the previous or of some earlier year. M. Philippe Hériat, who received the prize last November, belongs to neither category. Nothing that he had previously published attracted special attention, and yet he lives in Paris. Furthermore, *Les Enfants gâtés*,* the novel which was the occasion of the award, has failed to win the approval of critics. The novel, it has been said, is machine-made, and the presence of the author is obvious on every page.

A summary of the plot supports this verdict. The characters are French, and the scene is laid in France. But Agnès, the heroine, has passed four years in California, where she had a lover. When she returns to her family in Paris, she is going to have a baby, and presently she sees in a newspaper the announcement of her lover's engagement. She confides in her cousin Xavier, who promptly saves the situation by marrying her. Of course the baby is born after less than the customary interval, and this fact affords Aunt Emma the opportunity of having a serious talk with Xavier. She considers herself entitled to speak plainly, because when he was a boy she half adopted him. She tells him that he is not the father of the child. He replies by saying that he has known this all along. Thereupon Aunt Emma launches a bombshell. She informs him

*Gallimard.

that in any event it is impossible for him to have children, inasmuch as in the course of a necessary operation which he underwent in infancy he was sterilized. Xavier goes and throws himself out of a window. He is still alive when picked up, and he only expires while Agnès is conveying him in an ambulance to a nursing home. Her child grows into a promising boy, and she is going to be a very good mother.

In the face of this plot, it might be thought that the Goncourt committee last year acted capriciously. To consider merely the plot, however, is to miss the point of the novel. Agnès and Xavier are members of the affluent French *bourgeoisie*, and the plot has been devised in order to enable the author to depict the jealousy, mutual suspiciousness, spying, reconciliations, and pride of a family of this class. M. Hériat has wished to arraign the most powerful caste in France by showing the kind of life that is led in that caste. Once this intention is understood, the significance of the award of the Prix Goncourt becomes apparent. *Les Enfants gâtés* received the prize because it is a clever novel in a vein at present thoroughly in favour with French writers of fiction. For that is the curious thing about last year's output of books across the Channel: at the very time when, according to the French Government, the French Press, and countless individual Frenchmen, France is engaged in a life-and-death struggle to preserve her own social modes, French writers are attacking one or another aspect of the French social system.

M. Charles Plisnier put himself in the front rank of younger French novelists at one leap. His first novel, *Mariages*, appeared in 1936, and won such good opinions that in the following year he was given the Prix Goncourt for a book of short stories. He has now embarked on what he says will be a novel in five volumes. The general title is *Meurtres*.* The first instalment was published rather more than a year ago, and the second, which is called *Le Retour du fils*, last December. The two instalments together

*Corréa.

are enough to make it clear that M. Plisnier, like M. Hériat, is engaged in exposing the weaknesses and vices of the well-to-do French middle-class. Hervé and Blaise Annequin are the sons of a village schoolmaster, but they have risen well above the social status of their father. One is a successful lawyer, the other a successful doctor. At the beginning of the novel, their younger brother, Noël, is married to an incurable invalid, Isabelle, and, unable to bear the sight of her interminable suffering, he one day kills her. The two successful brothers have only one concern: to avoid a scandal; and to that end they do not hesitate to try to get Noël certified. However, he is acquitted and he disappears. Soon afterwards Hervé becomes a *bâtonnier* (the equivalent, let us call it, to taking silk) and Blaise is put in charge of the laboratories at the local hospital. In the first case the distinction has been obtained by devious intrigues, and in the second the appointment is evidently not unconnected with a friendship between the wife of Blaise and the elderly chairman of the hospital committee. The reader is given to understand that in such families each generation produces its black sheep. First there was Noël; now there is Hervé's son José, who is recklessly spoilt by his mother and grows up both a hypocrite and a thief.

The defect of both M. Hériat and M. Plisnier is that they deliver their attack on too wide a front. It is nothing less than the whole morals and conduct of the *bourgeoisie* that they seek to call in question. M. Henry de Montherlant, whom distinguished critics look upon as the most accomplished of living French novelists, concentrates on only one sector. He has been pouring scorn not so much on the institution of marriage as on the attitude of women to marriage. The high esteem in which he is held in certain quarters is compensated by reservations elsewhere, and to me the latter seem justified. The Nietzschean strain in M. de Montherlant which leads him to laud bull-fighting and warfare and display contempt for women is further reflected in the pretentiousness that sometimes infects his style. But although his charm is self-conscious, it is the real

thing. His writing is more mannered to-day than when he sprang into prominence about eighteen years ago, and yet it often has an air of effortless spontaneity which results now and then in passages of a glowing magnificence. He is a purely intuitive psychologist, but very likely that is the only kind of psychologist a writer of novels should be; and certainly he endows the behaviour of his characters with an arresting verisimilitude. He too has been issuing a long novel in instalments. It began in 1937 with a volume called *Les Jeunes filles*, and has only lately been completed with a fourth entitled *Les Lépreuses*.* The story is about a novelist named Costals who receives letters from unknown feminine admirers of his books. One such woman is bold enough to call on him, but physically she repels him, and in order to get rid of her he refuses to open his door, for he is not a violent but a crafty he-man. Then one day at a party he meets a girl called Solange, about whom there is something that stirs him to undertake her seduction. Very soon she half yields to him, and presently her surrender is complete. But it is marriage that both she and her mother have in view. Although Costals has a son of fifteen or sixteen, he has never married; he is not the marrying kind. He goes on seeing Solange, and comes to feel that he is going to be trapped. So he runs away to Genoa. Once away, however, he misses her, and asks her to rejoin him. At the beginning of the final volume he at length agrees that they shall be engaged. Almost instantly Solange undergoes a metamorphosis. She no longer restrains herself in his presence, and he decides that she is shrewish, possessive, silly, and altogether impossible. He runs away again. This time he goes to Morocco, and visits a leper colony. He sleeps with a woman, and is tormented with the fear that she has infected him with leprosy. The fear is groundless, but while it lasts the strong man appears in all his weakness.

A same exasperated dissatisfaction with contemporary morals and conduct may be found in recent French books of

*Grasset. The first two volumes have been translated into English, and issued as one.

the kind described as non-fiction. In *L'Amour et l'occident*,* M. Denis de Rougemont accepts everything that either M. de Montherlant or any one else has to say against marriage, and then goes on to put forward a vigorous defence of Christian marriage. M. de Rougemont, who is a French Swiss, writes as a Lutheran who has been influenced by Kierkegaard and Karl Barth. His view is that, whatever the objections to marriage, they afford no ground for the way in which society now not only tolerates but actively fosters and encourages divorce and unfaithfulness. The eagerness of so many men and women to effect a change of partners is inspired, he says, by the delusion that a change can produce happiness, whereas actually happiness, if attainable at all, is only to be found in fidelity to a plighted troth. He goes further. He contends that the cult of passionate love outside marriage—the customary prelude nowadays to a change of partner—is but the debased vestige of a medieval cult of passion typified in the legend of Tristan and Iseult. Passion then culminated in the death and annihilation of the lovers, and, although vicious, it was yet noble. But we to-day who recoil from death and yet yearn for passion are at once immoral and flabby. Even if this part of *L'Amour et l'occident* should be rejected, the defence of Christian marriage on sociological and psychological grounds would still possess the force of the unexpected.

I come lastly to what was perhaps the outstanding book published in France last year—M. André Gide's *Journal*,† a book of no fewer than 1,330 close-printed pages, which brings together the author's day-to-day reflections from 1889, when he was twenty, to the beginning of 1939. It may seem odd that a writer as prolific as M. Gide should have taken the trouble to keep so elaborate a diary. The fact is that a Frenchman, if in the least inclined to handle the pen, derives a keen satisfaction from self-analysis. Of

*Plon. I cannot omit a reference to this book, although I have translated it into English. The English version, entitled *Passion and Society*, is in the press as this is being written.

†Gallimard.

this the outbreak of the war furnished a striking illustration. Mobilization affected French writers more than it did English. It is therefore a matter for congratulation that one of the best French monthlies, *Esprit*, continued to come out, albeit much reduced in size. In its first war number it published several pages of notes contributed by readers either in or out of uniform who wished to describe their feelings and state of mind in the face of an epoch-marking event.

Although M. Gide has probably edited his diary for publication, he has left in a number of trivial entries. He does not seem to have realized that mere catalogues of the titles of the books he was reading at one time or another are of no value. But in spite of too many pages of this kind, the diary is unquestionably absorbing. Yet the final impression left by it is that of a dissatisfied man—dissatisfied with his bouts of ill-health, his insomnia, the conduct of his friends, the unfairness of his enemies, the misunderstandings of his critics. I need not say that the *Journal* is another of the attacks on the structure and activities of contemporary society. M. Gide, who announced his adoption of Communism in 1933, is not the man to be pleased with things as they are. I wish only to refer to one of his condemnations—that of the churches. M. Gide was brought up a Protestant; and if there is no sign that he was ever assiduous in public worship he has never ceased to read the New Testament. But he considers that the churches have all betrayed Christianity. What prevents him from undergoing conversion, he once remarked to M. Paul Claudel, is not free thought, but the Gospel. In the assumption that Christianity as contained in the Gospel is irreconcilable with the Christianity of the churches, M. Gide resembles Kierkegaard. But Kierkegaard forsook churches of every kind because he was convinced of having discovered in the Gospel a far more rigorous Christianity than the churches inculcate. M. Gide, on his side, seems to reject the churches because so long as he interprets the Gospel for himself he can find it favourable to his own idiosyncrasies. The distinction establishes the relative stature of the two men.

STEPHEN SPENDER

THE ESSENTIAL HOUSMAN*

Here are the collected poems of Housman—one hundred and seventy-five poems, and three short translations of Greek Choruses. Of these, seventy poems were not published during the poet's lifetime, and one may guess that he would certainly have wished the greater number of his posthumously published poems to have been suppressed.

Anyhow, the publication of *More Poems* and *Additional Poems* disposes of any idea that Housman may have burned or concealed a great many poems that would have extended the range of his poetry. The posthumous poems are interesting, but on the whole they do him a disservice, because although they contain beautiful lines, and even whole poems as good as many he wrote, they say in a cruder form, which sometimes amounts almost to parody, what he had said before, and they do the one thing which Housman must have wanted to avoid doing—heighten the reader's curiosity about the biographical background to his poetry.

If one starts thinking of Housman's poems in this way, one can go on trimming and paring away poems around a fairly well-defined core which one might call the Essential Housman, of perhaps less than fifty poems, in which Housman really says all he has to say. The remainder of the poems are slight, or attempts to say something which he conveyed better in other poems, or else introductory ornaments, like the opening poems in *A Shropshire Lad* and *Last Poems*.

At his best, Housman is a poet of great force and passion whose music is quite unforced, combining sensuousness with a cold discipline which gives the poetry an almost anony-

*The Collected Poems of A. E. Housman (*Cape* 7/6).

mous quality of being something said rightly, rather than something said by someone:

“A Grecian lad, as I hear tell,
One that many loved in vain,
Looked into a forest well
And never looked away again.
There when the turf in springtime flowers,
With downward eye and gazes sad,
Stands amid the glancing showers
A jonquil, not a Grecian lad.”

When one recalls how this stanza is contrasted with the stanza that precedes it, nothing could be more admirable and yet spontaneous than the organization of these lines. The repeated word “looked”, the lingering of the fifth line, the effectiveness of “downward” in the sixth line, and then the pause with the word “stands” are all uses of language so appropriate that the lines seem to spring from the scene they describe. The same may be said of another poem in *Last Poems*, No. XXXIII, which begins:

“When the eye of day is shut,
And the stars deny their beams,
And about the forest hut
Blows the roaring wood of dreams,

From deep clay, from desert rock,
From the sunk sands of the main,
Come not at my door to knock,
Hearts that love me not again.”

To the end of his life Housman could write lines which have a resilient leaping quality, like “The blue height of the hollow roof,” in poem XV of *Additional Poems*.

Housman wrote some great poetry if not great poems and no criticism can lessen the value of certain lines and whole poems which have an independent rightness and

certainty which is beyond comment. All criticism can do is to attempt to define the range of his poetry, and say whether the pessimistic philosophy which he advances repeatedly in poem after poem is an adequate attitude towards life.

Housman's poems have properties as defined as the machinery of diabolism in Baudelaire: the countryside of Western England, the lads who are brave and true, the references to the ancient world, the stilted and firmly established imperialism. Within this environment, there springs a poetry which has three main sources of inspiration: a frustrated love, a passion for justice, equally frustrated, and the view that life is misery and that man is only happy when he is safely under the ground.

Ultimately, the whole of Housman's pessimism and sense of injustice springs from the idea of frustrated love:

“He, standing hushed, a pace or two apart,
Among the bluebells of the listless plain,
Thinks and remembers how he cleansed his heart
And washed his hands in innocence in vain.”

The young, the straight, the true, the brave, gain nothing from their virtue; they are shot just the same, and the world is so vile a place that they are happiest dead: “Let us endure an hour and see injustice done.”

This frustration is best in its purest form when it expresses a complete despair, as in “When the eye of day is shut.” At other times it is merely suicidal, as in dozens of these poems, and at others it becomes ludicrous:

“Now in Maytime to the wicket
Out I march with bat and pad:
See the son of grief at cricket
Trying to be glad.

Try I will; no harm in trying:
Wonder 'tis how little mirth
Keeps the bones of man from lying
On the bed of earth.”

If one compares Housman's love poems with those of Donne, one sees how inadequate his rejection of love and hence life is. In Donne we feel that the poet has tasted deeply of life, and that while he is still tasting it, it turns to ashes. In Housman, we feel that he had a youthful disappointment on which he constructed an edifice of personal despair and bitterness which lasted a lifetime. For Housman himself this disappointment may have been tragic, but it is not valid as a judgement by which the whole of life, or even the life of the senses can be condemned. The effect of Donne's poetry is to make one feel that life is haunted by the sense of death and guilt; the effect of Housman's, after one has reached a certain age, merely to make one feel very sorry for Housman.

The nature of Housman's disappointment is revealed in these lines:

“ Because I liked you better
 Than suits a man to say,
It irked you, and I promised
 To throw the thought away.

To put the world between us
 We parted, stiff and dry;
‘ Goodbye,’ said you, ‘ forget me ’.
 ‘ I will, no fear,’ said I.

If here, where clover whitens
 The dead man's knoll, you pass,
And no tall flower to meet you
 Starts in the trefoiled grass,

Halt by the headstone naming
 The heart no longer stirred
And say the lad that loved you
 Was one that kept his word.”

The idea of death simply as a negation of life is very strong in Housman. The idea of the city that is not, the young man who is not, the lover who is not,

“The pale, the perished nation
That never see the sun,”

recurs again and again in this purely negative form. For him there is just life and not-life. Death, as he points out in one of his poems, is the same as not having been born.

Death the negation of life, ill the negation of good, injustice the negation of justice, everything in Housman's poetry exists side by side in a pure and undiluted form, with the balance, of course, always on the side of the bad, because there is bound to be more death, more evil, more injustice in the world at any given moment than the reverse. He rather grudgingly admits:

“. . . Since the world has still
Much good but much less good than ill,”

and in another poem, he sees everywhere the quantities of:

“Horror and scorn and hate and fear and indignation.”

His puritanism is of a kind which is always very close to death not in a religious sense, like Donne or the Elizabethans, but in a pseudo-scientific sense, like Aldous Huxley's novels, simply because there is so much death and corruption about. But this means that life too ceases to be positive and becomes merely a feeble little effort to pretend, with cricket balls, footballs, sex, Shropshire, etc., that it is worth doing, when to the honest man it must be evident that nothing positive has any virtue because of the immense surplus of what is not which denies and frustrates it the whole time.

Housman once compared himself with T. E. Lawrence. One of the qualities he must have shared with that other

great scholar—though he did not indulge it to the same extent—is surely a shrinking from publicity combined with an almost violently censured tendency towards exhibitionism. Both Housman and Lawrence throw out a kind of double legend which is probably the shadow of a double personality. The one legend is of a severe, puritanical, repressed, passionately single-minded, integrated personality, one who has looked evil fearlessly in the eyes, is master of his destiny. The other legend, of which Lawrence and Housman both disclaim all responsibility, is of a mysterious and withdrawn personality, who not only has a secret clue to his passional life, but to whom also something has definitely happened at some period in his life which will not happen again. Both writers evidently want the mystery to remain a mystery. At the same time they cannot help throwing out hints and using the second unofficial legend of the mystery-man to add intensity to the first legend of the man who is stifling his personality. One side of Housman censured the posthumously published poems; but the other side scored a victory in writing them at all; moreover this second Housman managed to insert numerous dark hints to puzzle generations of Wykehamists in *Last Poems*, and even in *The Shropshire Lad* itself.

Why are there two sides to Housman's poetry? I think it may be that Housman recognized the inadequacy of his philosophy of life, and wished to reinforce it with special pleading in defence of his own personal situation. This opens out another possibility: that he might have thrown aside the role of repression altogether and written a poetry which explored his own personality. But this would have involved accepting far more of life than he was willing to accept.

There is another writer with certain affinities to Housman who did this; that is Gerard Manley Hopkins. He also was a writer who was for ever at war with one side of his personality, but he did not reject and disown it and condemn the whole of life on the strength of it as Housman did. Comparing Hopkins and Housman, one sees the superiority

of the Catholic environment to the Protestant and Puritan. In Hopkins there is a continual struggle, there is not a blank refusal and an enforced silence. Housman had what is called "integrity", Hopkins had honesty and audacity. Hopkins's poetry is that of a man who struggles with life and illuminates more and more life in the process. Housman's is that of a wonderfully mummified and preserved everlasting young man, like one of his narcissistic lads who stands for ever by the stream and looks at his image in the waters.

SELECTED NOTICES

Finland's War of Independence by Lieut.-Col. J. O. Hannula. Faber & Faber 12/6. With maps and photographs.

Although casting light on a little-known sideshow of the Russian Revolution, this book probably does not give much clue to the present situation in Finland. The Finnish campaign of 1918 was in fact what Russian propaganda represents the present war as being—a civil war between Reds and Whites, with the Reds probably representing a majority of the population. Except that the peasants were White and that foreign intervention was more considerable on the side of the Reds, the general set-up was rather like that of the civil war in Spain. The earlier part of the war, consisting of innumerable disconnected battles between small bodies of men, gives the general effect of a harlequinade in a butcher's shop but is almost impossible to follow even with the aid of maps. Later, the Reds having failed to make decisive use of their numerical superiority, the war was stabilised in southern Finland and Mannerheim was able to build up a White militia with the Civic Guards, the local gendarmerie, as their nucleus, while a Red force which seems to have been distinctly similar to the early Spanish militias was built up on the other side. The Russian garrisons had mostly joined the Reds, who were further fed with men and materials from Russia, while the fact that Germany was temporarily at war with the Bolsheviks gave the Germans an excuse to intervene on the side of the Whites. Making all allowance for propaganda, it is easy to see that Mannerheim is a commander of unusual ability. The fighting was all over by May, 1918. As in nearly all civil wars, both sides imposed conscription, and, as in Spain, both sides were justly suspicious of their foreign "friends". No doubt, also, both sides were guilty of massacres, though Colonel Hannula only mentions those perpetrated by the

Reds, in which he is not borne out by other accounts of the war. Otherwise he seems fairly friendly to the Reds and often praises their courage and military skill. This book is presumably of considerable historical value but is too detailed to make easy reading.

Secret Service by Sir George Aston. Faber & Faber 7/6.

A book on British espionage methods published in 1930 would probably not be reprinted at this moment if it revealed anything of importance. Actually this book consists for the most part of gossipy anecdotes, including the stories of those two evergreens of the Sunday papers, Karl Lody and Mata Hari, and at the end there are some very elementary notes on ciphers and sympathetic inks. The impression one gathers is that most spies are extremely amateurish people who believe incredible stories (Lody actually believed and reported the story of the Russian troops passing through England) and give themselves away by making childish mistakes. That this is *not* so is shown by the exact information that the great powers nearly always possess about one another's armaments. Sir George Aston gives several instances of battles on the Western front in which the commanders on either side knew with almost complete accuracy the number of troops opposing them. But he does not say how the information was obtained, and the conclusion one carries away from a scrappy though readable book is that those who have beans to spill never spill them.

GEORGE ORWELL.

Studies in Medieval Thought by G. G. Coulton. Nelson, 2/6 (Discussion Books No. 65).

The Idiocy Of Idealism by Oscar Levy. Hodge, 5/-.

Most historians are interesting by being unfair; Dr. Coulton—and this is what makes the pleasure of reading him a subtle one—by being fair. Quite detached, apparently agnostic and ready to disavow as wishfulfilment, say, or a superior kind of superstition, all the main tenets of

Christianity in the Middle Ages, he nevertheless respects those tenets as much as if they were his own. That is why his accounts of the greatest figures in medieval Christian thought are so luminous. He always lets the subject expand itself under his hand, rather than chopping and carving it to suit some *parti pris* or temperamental bias. His new book is a panorama of medieval life on the intellectual side, starting with an introductory chapter on the disintegration of the pagan Empire and the *pax romana*, and taking in the great thinking protagonists from Augustine down to Wyclif and Cusanus. He writes, not graphically, but very clearly; historian not philosopher, he can correct current misconceptions about medieval thought but not transvaluate values, his metaphysical sense is quite workmanlike but unremarkable, he has no startling re-orientations of medieval thought to make on to our own times (a pity; the subject is by nature a mine of such strange parallels and brilliant surprises). Within these limits this book, like his others, is excellent; always scholarly, never donnish, a pleasant, readable handbook of information.

Mr. Levy is out to prove that both Bolshevism and Nazism are Jewish in origin: the first being a secular rebirth of Christianity, the second of Judaism. All four are hateful, because in the name of "the Kingdom" or "the State" (same thing) they delude men into unspeakable crimes and barbarities; this is the "idiocy of idealism". The case is ironical, interesting and arguable, but the hamfisted and rhetorical Mr. Levy wrecks the irony, argues badly and bores the reader. A translator of Nietzsche, he emits sub-Nietzschean wisecracks with an air of masterly wisdom; his pages have a shop-soiled air. Blind oversimplifications, unproven assumptions, a lack of *method* (a decision taken beforehand on how to think) make this a silly little book,—Shaw found it "very readable", though. Fundamentally it is a jealous book: mean rather than critical. Intellectually speaking, Mr. Levy is the kind of Jew who has "cut off his nose to spite his race".

PARTISAN REVIEW

... is an American leftwing literary magazine, which has appeared regularly since 1937. Its political orientation is Marxist, but it is independent of any political party. It publishes literary criticism, political articles, stories, and poetry.

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<i>Victor Serge</i>	Conquered City, excerpts from a novel

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